

**KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS THAT BEGINNER PIANO TEACHERS NEED
TO TEACH A MUSIC PROGRAM IN KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA**

A project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education

Siew Yong Cheah
LRSM, ARCM

School of Education
College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University
February 2012

Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Siew Yong Cheah

(22nd August, 2012)

Glossary

ABRSM: Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music

AMEB: Australian Music Education Board

CD: Compact Disc

DVD: Digital Video Disc

LCM: London College of Music

RMIT: Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

UK: United Kingdom

USA: United States of America

VMTA: Victorian Music Teachers' Association

Papers presented during candidature

Cheah, S. Y. (2009). Studio teaching and musical understanding: A general concept of piano studio teaching in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Abstract published in W. Baker (Ed.) *Musical Understanding*. Proceedings of the Australian Society for Music Education National Conference, Launceston.

Cheah, S. Y. (2009). An investigation into the preparation and needs of novice piano teachers in Kuala Lumpur. In *Proceedings of the Asian Pacific Symposium on Music Education Research*, Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Shanghai, China.

Cheah, S. Y. (2010). Investigating the approaches to learning and teaching in instrumental studio environment of novice teachers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Abstract published in W. L. Sims (Ed.) *Proceedings of the XIX World Conference of the International Society for Music Education*. Beijing.

Cheah, S. Y. (2011). The development of a guidebook for new graduate piano teachers In E. Mackinlay & D. Forrest (Ed.) *Making sound waves. Proceedings of the XVIII ASME Conference*, Gold Coast.

Cheah, S. Y. (2011). Methodology and findings on knowledge, skills and successful teaching programs for new piano teachers. Paper presented at Australian and New Zealand Association for Research in Music Education conference, Gold Coast.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
Title page	i
Declaration	ii
Glossary	iii
Papers presented during candidature	iv
Table of Contents	v
Abstract	1
 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	 2
Background	3
Rationale of the study	3
Scope, location of the study and limitations	3
Research questions	4
 CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY	 5
Use of literature to assist in identifying the research questions	5
Developing the research questions	5
Research instruments	6
Survey processes	7
The interview	8
Data management	10
 CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW	 12
Introduction	12
Studio teaching for piano teachers	12
Establishing essentials: avoiding and addressing faults	14
Teacher knowledge and skills	17
Practice	20
Sight-reading	22
Musicianship skills	25
Group teaching	27
Music examinations	30
 CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	 33
 4.1 Questions and Findings from the Survey	 33
Age of Respondents	33
Teaching years	34
Qualifications	34
Student numbers	35

Areas for improvement	36
The three most important goals for beginner and elementary students	37
Basic foundation	38
Common problems	40
Acquiring knowledge and skills for teaching beginners and elementary piano students	41
Teaching program	43
The three most difficult teaching areas in a music program	45
Area of piano learning that students most like/dislike	48
Advice for encouraging practice	50
The importance of practice	51
Advantages/disadvantages of group learning	52
Music examinations	54
Encouraging students to think and learn independently	55
Choosing a suitable method book	56
Basic skills	58
Effective ways of teaching	59
Aspects of a good lesson	60
Teacher-enrichment skills	61
Important characteristics for teachers	62
Appropriate personal qualities for teachers	62
Essential qualities needed to be a successful teacher	62
4.2 Questions and findings from interviews	65
Topic 1: Teacher profile	65
Topic 2: Novice Teachers	67
Topic 3: Teacher skills, knowledge and qualities	69
Topic 4: Teaching Program	73
Topic 5: Sight- reading	78
Topic 6: Practice	80
Topic 7: Theory of music	82
Topic 8: Music examinations	83
Topic 9: Parental guidance	84
Topic 10. Advice for teachers	85
CHAPTER 5: THE BOOK	88
Developing a guidebook for beginning piano teachers	88
Book Title: <i>Searching for answers in piano teaching</i>	89
Preface	89
Section 1: <i>Studio teaching for piano teachers</i>	91
<i>Introduction</i>	91
<i>Piano studio teaching</i>	91
<i>Commencing lessons at an early age</i>	91

<i>Parental involvement</i>	92
<i>Teacher-student relationship</i>	93
<i>Studio ethics</i>	94
 Section 2: <i>Establishing essentials: avoiding and addressing faults</i>	 96
<i>Introduction</i>	96
<i>Why is a good foundation important for piano beginners?</i>	96
<i>Addressing faults in beginner pianists</i>	97
<i>Relaxation</i>	98
<i>Time (pulse) and rhythm</i>	98
<i>Learning to read</i>	98
<i>Training students to listen: developing the ear</i>	99
<i>Concentration</i>	100
 Section 3: <i>Teacher knowledge and skills</i>	 101
<i>Background of teachers</i>	101
<i>Teacher attributes</i>	101
<i>Business skills</i>	102
 Section 4: <i>Practice, Sight-reading, Musicianship skills, Group teaching</i>	 104
<i>Practice</i>	104
<i>Sight-reading</i>	105
<i>Musicianship Skills</i>	106
<i>Group Teaching</i>	108
 Section 5: <i>Music examinations</i>	 110
 <i>Afterword</i>	 115
 <i>Recommended books for novice teachers</i>	 118
 CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	 121
 APPENDICES	 123
Appendix 1: Ethics approval letter	124
Appendix 2: Letters to the two groups of respondents and the Consent Form	125
Appendix 3: Survey questionnaire	127
Appendix 4: Interview format	132
 References	 134

Abstract

In Kuala Lumpur, the piano teacher population ranges from unqualified to qualified teachers. They may possess certification from the examining boards in United Kingdom, while others may be qualified holding Music degrees from local or overseas' universities. Private piano teachers encounter problems in their daily work and there are many unanswered questions.

The research question that guided the research was: What are the knowledge and skills that beginner piano teachers need to teach a music program in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia? Following this main research question was a secondary question that asks: What might an introductory guidebook for novice teachers look like?

A survey was administered to discover some areas that teachers and students need focus and attention. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with experienced piano teachers to obtain deeper insight into piano teaching. The findings from my research indicated there were areas of piano pedagogy that needed addressing.

The aim of this research was to find answers and solutions to guide new beginner teachers start their teaching career, to teach beginner students learn to play the piano appropriately. The main outcome of the research was the development of a guidebook entitled *Searching for answers in piano teaching* for novice studio teachers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

This guidebook would be suitable to assist practicing and prospective private piano teachers. It covers an array of issues and problems on teaching. Problems and issues of a generic nature were discussed alongside those specific to instrumental teaching, providing ideas, concepts and viewpoints on various methods and approaches in private piano studio teaching.

The chapters from this introductory guidebook for new graduate piano teachers include the following topics: studio teaching; importance of building good groundwork by establishing appropriate essentials and avoiding and addressing faults; teacher knowledge and skills; ways to encourage practice; focusing on the significance of sight-reading; developing musicianship skills; the benefits of group learning and pros and cons of music examination.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It is traditional practice in Malaysia – and in many other countries – to conduct one-on-one piano teaching, commonly known as private teaching or studio teaching. Whilst teachers generally teach in their own homes or studios, a relatively few travel to the student's home. Whilst it has been common for some children to learn piano in Malaysia – earlier known as Malaya – for most of the last century, in the last three decades or so there has been a comparative resurgence of interest in this pursuit.

This research project aims to gather information from teachers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on certain practices and approaches to piano studio teaching. Information was gathered from 59 teachers using a survey instrument; an additional 10 teachers were interviewed. The information obtained, together with a review of relevant literature, and the researcher's experience of teaching piano – and violoncello – for over thirty years, provides the basis for the development of an introductory guidebook for beginner or novice piano teachers.

The guidebook, which is presented as a chapter of this exegesis, is written with particular reference to the Malaysian context; it contains five sections:

Section 1: *Studio teaching for piano teachers*

Section 2: *Establishing essentials: avoiding and addressing faults*

Section 3: *Teacher knowledge and skills*

Section 4: *Practice, Sight-reading, Musicianship skills, Group teaching*

Section 5: *Music examinations*

This guidebook is an integral part of this project. Although it may also be of some interest to experienced piano teachers, it is written to get novice teachers started. Another book could be written that explores in detail many of the issues introduced in this introductory book for novice teachers. The researcher's experience of teaching piano – and violoncello – in Malaysia strongly suggests the need to provide a guidebook that might assist novice piano teachers as they commence – or contemplate – a career as a studio teacher.

Background

In Malaysia, the number of candidates undertaking music examinations is very high compared to many other countries. As a result there is a great demand for good quality music teachers. Although there are many qualified teachers whose students consistently produce good results, it is nonetheless disturbing that there are also some unqualified teachers, some of whom show scant interest in improving or upgrading their knowledge and skills. Ideally this study and, in particular, the guidebook, may assist and encourage them to improve their teaching and musical skills. Certainly, it offers assistance for those who might wish to address issues of piano pedagogy.

Rationale of the study

Through my thirty-plus years as a piano and violoncello teacher I have come across numerous problems concerning many areas of music teaching. I know from discussions with other teachers that they have faced issues and concerns similar to mine. In addition to my experience as a teacher, the research undertaken for this study has enabled me to develop the accompanying guidebook, which offers advice on how to solve students' problems and suggests methods to guide novice teachers.

During the initial stages of piano learning, it is crucial that beginner students develop good habits across a number of areas; for example, good music reading skills, good practising techniques, good posture, and so on. It follows that teachers must pay special attention from the beginning to ensure that students develop such habits in all areas. The guidebook presents ideas, views, opinions, proposals and solutions on different aspects of piano pedagogy. Certainly, novice music teachers – and even, perhaps, those who have some experience – will find some interesting ideas to explore.

Piano texts in general address various issues of piano pedagogy; this one is specially written with Malaysian piano teachers in mind. Potentially, it might have a place in the piano teaching literature for South East Asian countries, including Singapore and Hong Kong, both of which also have a relatively high percentage of children learning music and undertaking music examinations. But my principal hope is that new insights might be gained from the guidebook that will be of particular benefit to those involved in piano pedagogy in Malaysia. Entitled *Searching for answers in piano teaching*, it is one of the first guidebooks – or even the first of its kind – written by a Malaysian to offer advice to those involved in piano teaching and learning in Malaysia.

Scope, location of the study and limitations

Although data for the research was collected only from piano teachers in Kuala Lumpur – my experience suggests that there is no reason to believe that the situation is any different elsewhere in Malaysia. Certainly, Kuala Lumpur, being the capital city and the largest city in the country, accounts for the majority of piano teachers and students. Unfortunately, there is no organisation for piano teachers along the lines, for example, of the Victorian Music Teachers' Association. Teachers, further, as in Victoria and elsewhere in Australia, are not required to be formally 'registered' in order to teach. It is not surprising therefore that there are no records of the exact number of private music teachers in Malaysia. It appears however that the figure is increasing yearly. Most private music teachers tend to be guarded in what information they disclose about their teaching practice, and it is not common for teachers to get together and discuss freely their teaching methods or particular issues that they face. Very few seminars are available for teachers to attend; those that are offered are conducted by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), the London College of Music, and Trinity Guildhall – all of which are examination boards based in the United Kingdom – and the respective seminars have a particular focus on their examination syllabi. It is certainly not part of the Malaysian private music teaching culture for teachers to allow others to observe them teaching in their studios; this of course imposes limitations on the nature of research that can be conducted. Consequently there is little or no possibility of using observation as a research tool to collect information.

Research questions

The study involved piano teachers currently teaching the piano in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The survey administered to 60 teachers, and the intensive interviews undertaken with a further 10 teachers, took place in 2008.

The main research question guiding this study is:

What are the knowledge and skills that beginner piano teachers need to teach a music program in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia?

This of course leads into the secondary question:

What might an introductory guidebook for novice teachers look like?

And it was consideration of this question that resulted in the development of such a guidebook that is included in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Use of literature to assist in identifying the research questions

In developing my research questions I examined relevant literature and, on the basis of my knowledge of and familiarity with piano teaching in Malaysia, developed the questions that I posed to teachers in the questionnaire and to those whom I interviewed. Planning and developing research questions require searching into the huge body of literature available. The various methods of searching for literature are through “books, scholarly journal articles, [and] dissertations” (Neuman, 2006, p. 112) and also “a database [which] is a collection of information on articles and materials that have been published, presented at conferences, or created by various educational groups or individuals” (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006, p. 36).

A literature review, in Chapter 3 can broaden the bigger picture in relation to the area to be researched. Dawson (2007) reminds researchers that they must ensure that a “Comprehensive and thorough background research and literature review has been undertaken” (p. 64). Clark and Creswell (2010) explain that “Reviewing the literature is an important step in the research process because it provides researchers with information about what is and is not known about the study’s topic” (p. 113). Johnson and Christensen (2004) mention, “As with any type of educational research, the first step is to identify a topic you wish to investigate and then formulate the research problem or question you wish to answer” (p. 395). Research areas “can be stimulated by any of a variety of sources” (p. 395).

As part of the process for identifying my research topic and forming research problems and questions, I began by examining some historical books on music teaching. Such writings help to “tell you what is known about your given research topic” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 397). According to Best and Kahn (2003) “History is a meaningful record of human achievement” (p. 79). They note that primary sources of data include newspapers, magazines, books, recordings, transcriptions and research reports. Early 20th century writings on music teaching are found in the university libraries where I carried out my literature search.

Developing the research questions

Through my years of teaching new and established students, I have noticed a number of faults and weaknesses that appear constantly. The survey and interview questions are based on the crucial areas concerning these problems.

My research is concerned with teachers who are commencing a career in piano teaching. Punch (2006) suggests to form research questions we have to ask ourselves “What are we trying to find out here? ... What questions is this research trying to answer?” (p. 15).

In answering this for myself, I came to the conclusion that novice piano teachers need to understand about knowledge and skills of teaching, including what kind of programs can be introduced to beginner students. It is common practice in Malaysia for new piano teachers to start teaching with beginner students. Questions like what to teach, when to teach and how to avoid problems are vitally important considerations. It stands to reason that if teaching is approached properly, fewer problems should arise; correcting mistakes is time-consuming for both teacher and student. The main research question of this study is: What are the knowledge and skills that novice piano teachers need to teach a music program in Kuala Lumpur? The secondary question follows from this. Clark and Creswell (2010) explain the process as “1. Posing a question. 2. Collecting data to answer the question. 3. Presenting an answer to the question” (p. 4).

An assumption underlying this research is that beginner teachers need to be well informed about the teaching and learning process if they are to offer a quality learning experience for their students. Of course, this applies to teachers at any level of experience. As Clark and Creswell (2010) say, “No matter how experienced you are in your practices, new problems continue to rise” and therefore it is important to “read recent research studies in addition to books ... [in order] to learn the most up-to-date information in your profession” (p. 4). Such study “can suggest improvement for your practice; research can help you improve practice by offering new ideas to consider; research can help you learn about and evaluate alternative approaches to use” (Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 5).

Research instruments

The principal research instruments used in this educational research project were survey questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. These two instruments were used to gather information about the knowledge and skills new teachers need in order to teach a music program successfully. Having more than one method of data collection can serve to “strengthen the evidence provided by a research study” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 193). It was anticipated that the survey procedures using these two instruments would demonstrate, measure and assess respondents’ thoughts, feelings and experiences. Taking the piano teaching population in Malaysia into consideration, sixty piano teachers with two or more years experience were asked to complete the self-administered questionnaire; in

addition, a further ten teachers with five or more years experience were interviewed by the researcher.

Survey processes

A survey is a way of finding out data from individuals concerning “feelings, values preference, and behavior” (Fink, 2006, p. 1). It is essential that questions are clearly worded, easy to understand, and enable respondents to readily respond to each question without being conscious of any ambiguity in the wording. Fink (2006) advises that when constructing questions it is essential “To make sure you can get all the data you need” (p. 12) and, in addition, “Write more questions than you plan to use because several will probably be rejected as unsuitable” (p. 13). Further, it is vital to prepare questions that “cover the complete domain of content you have identified as important to the survey” (Fink, 2006, p. 13). Phelps, Ferrara, and Goolsby (1993) have stated that, “The objectives of the questionnaire are drawn from the problem statement and sub-problem. You must list what specific information you wish to collect through the questionnaire, keeping in mind your reasons and how you will treat the responses” (p. 235).

Before forming a questionnaire, points to be considered are:

- What type of audience is being targeted?
- How are the questions to be formulated so that participants can understand and answer them correctly?
- Why will the participants cooperate in answering the questionnaire?

The questionnaire for this research survey was self-administered. According to Fink (2006) “Self-administered questionnaires require a great deal of preparation and monitoring to get a reasonable response rate” (p. 35). As such, a questionnaire has to be carefully designed to avoid any ambiguity in the questions.

In Kuala Lumpur the main language of instruction used in Government Schools is Bahasa Melayu, Malaysia’s national language. English language is a second language in all Government Public Schools. In Chinese medium (language) schools the first language is Mandarin while Bahasa Melayu and English are secondary languages. It was decided to write the questionnaire in English as it was reasonable to assume that all respondents would have a working knowledge of it. This is reinforced by the fact that nearly all music books are written in English and the music examinations that are very prevalent in Malaysia are conducted by

examining bodies from the UK. It was imperative nonetheless to ensure that the wording of the questionnaire was in simple yet precise language. This was further facilitated by using multiple choice responses that did not require teachers to write answers using their own words (although scope was provided for them to add further comments). The instructions for responding to the questionnaire, like the questions themselves, were worded in plain and basic English. In summary, the researcher was conscious of the need to “Write items that are clear, precise, and relatively short; [and] ... easy for the participant to use” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 166).

Of course, underscoring all of this is the importance of careful sample selection. The researcher was conscious of the need to ensure “that the sample group truly represents the population and is not distorted in any way by the nature of the selection process” (Locke, Silverman & Spirduso, 2010, p. 43). Those chosen to participate in this study – either by completing the questionnaire or by being interviewed – were representative of teachers with a wide range of experience in piano teaching; they also represented a diverse age range. For all of them, piano teaching was their main occupation.

All participants – those who completed the questionnaire as well as those interviewed – were given a Plain Language Statement on RMIT University letterhead in accordance with the University’s ethics procedures (Appendices 1 and 2). They were required to sign a letter (which had to be witnessed) of acknowledgement before the data was collected. A pre-paid envelope was provided for the return of the completed questionnaire. An excellent response rate was obtained: 59 of the 60 teachers contacted returned the completed questionnaire – a response rate of over 98%.

The interview

The second tool used was a one-on-one interview with ten teachers, which was more open-ended than the questionnaire and allowed for more scope in responses. Johnson and Christensen (2004) comment that “Qualitative interviews consist of open-ended questions and provide qualitative data” (p. 183). Besides being able to tap into the inner thoughts of the interviewee, a qualitative interview provides a deeper insight into “a participant’s thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations and feelings about a topic” (p. 183). “A strength of interviews is that a researcher can freely use probes” to elicit more information from the interviewees (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 178). In the process it is important that the interviewer establish a sense of trust and rapport. To be successful in interviewing the researcher must plan carefully and be sensitive to the wording and presentation of questions

posed. To facilitate this it is important, for example, to organize a time when the interviewee is not tired after a whole day's teaching. Full concentration is required for an interview lasting 45 to 60 minutes.

From the source of the teachers who were selected to be interviewed was the most recent annual music professional development seminar conducted by the UK's Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) held on July 2008. The method chosen is known as 'snow ball' sampling. Ludico et al. (2006) explain, that "Participants who possess certain characteristics are selected and asked to refer others with similar characteristics" (p. 141), while Clark and Creswell (2010) describe 'snowball sampling' as a "strategy to select individuals ... based on the recommendations of participants to identify participants unknown to the researcher" (p. 254).

Ten of the participants in the ABRSM seminar were interviewed on August 2008 subsequent to the seminar using the snow ball sampling technique; it was ensured that all of them had at least five years teaching experience. These subjects met the dictum of Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) that interviewees must have "unique and important knowledge ... that is ascertainable through verbal communication" (p. 119) whereby a vast amount of data can be accumulated into "interview transcripts" and later decreased and selected by "analytical and interpretive process" (p. 120). A face-to-face interview with open-ended questions can "encourage the interviewee to provide more information than do closed questions" (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003, p. 53). In fact more information can be extracted by asking more questions that probe deeper into the subject of discussion. Whatever is not clearly explained can be reworded and asked again at face-to-face interviews.

The interviews were recorded. Although this has advantages in ensuring that nothing of the conversation is 'lost', it is essential that the interviewee feel comfortable with this process. Further, as Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) have said, "Note-taking can slow down the interview and distract the interviewer" (p. 53). A transcription of a recording is also "infinitely more reliable than any notes, quotes, remarks and summaries you might jot down during an interview" (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003, p. 47). All ten respondents in this study gave signed permission for their interview to be recorded. The interview questions (Appendix 4) were sent to each interviewee prior to the meeting. This helped them to prepare their responses and to ensure that they understood the questions which, in turn, gave them a sense of confidence in approaching the interview.

The interview location for each interviewee was different and was a result of negotiation between the two parties. It was essential that it was a place where the interviewee

was relaxed. The interview commenced with relatively general questions in order to get the interviewee “thinking about the issue”, followed by those that were guided and directed “towards more specific issues” (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1996, p.84). Where necessary, the interviewer used phrases such as those suggested by Dawson (2007): “Can you elaborate a little more? Could you clarify that? Could you expand on that a little? When you say ‘.....’ do you mean?” (p. 75).

Data management

Anderson (2001) remarks that a researcher “collects information about the world, processes it, and then through analysis draws conclusions” (p. 163). He adds that “Today of course we have a much wider spectrum of what is considered data and valid ways of measuring” (p. 163). Clark and Creswell (2010) state that

Researchers who collect qualitative text or image data need to use qualitative analysis procedures to make sense of this data. Qualitative data analysis consists of a researcher using systematic procedures to develop description and themes from text and image data about a central phenomenon. ... This analysis consists of the researcher developing a general sense of the data, coding for description and themes about the central phenomenon, and writing up the findings. (p. 277)

Neuman (2006) says that qualitative researchers are engaged in a process of assessment throughout the data collection process. “Qualitative researchers ... reflect on ideas before data collection, but they develop many, if not most, of their concepts during data collection. The qualitative researcher reexamines and reflects on the data and concepts simultaneously and interactively” (p. 181). Further, “As they gather data, they reflect on the process and develop new ideas that give them direction and suggest new ways to measure” (p. 181).

The responses to the 25 items of the questionnaire used in this study led to the formulation of 30 bar graphs (some questions had sub-sections). This is accompanied by a short discussion of each graph.

Lyons and Coyle (2007) stress “The initial coding of text is done after careful and repeated readings of the material” (p. 79). This was the case in the present study in which a process of careful scrutiny and dissection was used to discover or tease out points of interest, trends, or themes. These were then categorised according to their importance. Johnson and

Christensen (2004) refer to 'segmenting', which "involves dividing the data into meaningful analytical units. ... The segment of text must have meaning that the researcher thinks should be documented" (p. 502).

As data is analyzed reduction is taking place. According to Miles and Huberman (1994):

Data reduction is not something separate from analysis. It is *part* of analysis. The researcher's decisions – which data chunks to code and which to pull out, which patterns best summarize a number of chunks, which evolving story to tell – *are all analytic choices*. Data reduction is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organises data in such a way that 'final' conclusions can be drawn and verified. (p. 11)

It was with due consideration of these issues that the analysis and discussion of both the interviews and the questionnaire responses proceeded.

It must be added that this chapter has discussed methodology with respect to the questionnaire that was administered and the interviews conducted. The other methodological component of this study relates to the design of the book on piano teaching that forms a major part of this work. The methodology for this was based on the research discussed in this chapter, the literature review, as well as my own experience of teaching piano for more than 30 years.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review is discussed in relation to each of the five sections of the Book that I have written and which forms an essential component of the work for this degree. The Book is based on my own experience of more than 30 years as a piano teacher, the following literature review, and the analysis of the research component of this study which involved a survey of 59 piano teachers in Kuala Lumpur and interviews with a further 10 teachers.

In discussing the importance of a literature review Anderson (2001) suggests:

Successful research is based on all the knowledge, thinking and research that precedes it, and for this reason a review of the literature is an essential step in the process of embarking on a research study. A review of literature is a summary, analysis and interpretation of the theoretical, conceptual and research literature related to a topic or theme. It is broader than a review of the research which only reviews research literature. (p. 76)

Studio teaching for piano teachers

Music lessons are commonly conducted privately in the homes or studios of teachers. Lyke (1987) argues: “New research findings show the necessity of teaching one-on-one for certain students” (p. 2). In more recent years there has been a growing trend to provide group teaching, especially for very young children, and for teaching musicianship skills as distinct from keyboard performance. In the main, however, one-on-one teaching is the norm for piano teaching.

Studio teachers, especially when working with beginners, have the responsibility of inducting them into the world of keyboard playing and music in general. For this reason, Last (1966) argues:

The teacher of the beginner carries a big responsibility and should be as highly trained as the teacher of the more advanced pupil; but academic qualifications are not enough. The successful teacher sets out to understand the limitations of each pupil and approach every one as an individual. This understanding, allied to an untiring patience and a sense of humour, are the human qualifications required. (p. xi)

In agreeing to teach a student, a studio teacher takes on the responsibility of imparting skills and knowledge pertaining to all aspects of learning an instrument. This is not without its challenges and, amongst others, can involve reluctant students, problems relating to students' practising, and dealing with parents. Moss (1989) argues:

By accepting a student, a piano teacher assumes an enormous responsibility, becoming one of the moulders of a life and, perhaps, a career. A good teacher is able to discern the talents, latent or potential, of a student. He or she must be able to judge when to push students to a higher level or let them rest at a certain plateau until they are ready to advance again; when to insist on a higher level of concentration or to use old-fashioned straightforwardness to goad, reason with or challenge them. (p. 2)

As part of the process, teachers should offer a "varied and balanced" teaching program (Creech, 2010, p. 299). According to Coats (2006) "Our goal as music teachers is to prepare students to understand music and to skillfully play an instrument so they can enjoy music for the rest of their lives" (p. 1). She adds that teachers must guide and prepare students to "make musical decisions independently" (Coats, 2006, p. 1). Agay (2004) argues that teaching a child how to play an instrument is the giving of "a precious gift for a lifetime" and this should be the "task and goal" of every teacher (p. 7). It is important to bear in mind that extremely few young pianists ever go on to become concert pianists, but many form "a great part of our best audiences ... [and] active music lovers" (Varro, 1997, p. 4).

Before formal lessons start, teachers should endeavour to ascertain and find from students their reasons for learning the piano (if they have any) and their "aims and interest" (Bolton, 1953, p. 13). They must bear in mind that each student is an individual, having "different musical goals and limitations in ability" (Schaum & Cupp, 1987, p. 3). Piano teachers must ensure that they "provide a structure for the music program" that is meaningful and effective (Colwell, 1969, p. 12).

There is no common agreement on the optimum age for a child to commence learning the piano; some believe in starting very early, and others waiting until around "seven to nine ... [as] a child's nervous system and kinetic sense is rarely fully developed before six or seven" (Skaggs, 2004, p. 247). Of course, this will depend on each individual child, and other factors must also be taken into consideration. Each child is not only different in personality and character, but also in "background, aptitude, [and] interest" (Colwell, 1969, p. 21).

Many writers have argued the importance of parental support (Langley, 1963; Last, 1966; Bastein, 1995; Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1998; Agay, 2004; Baker-Jordan, 2004; Jacobson, 2006). “Nothing is more essential to the success of a young student than having the understanding and support of his parents” (Terwilliger, 1965, pp. 106-107). For Creech (2010) “During the crucial early years of learning, parents play a significant role in sustaining pupil commitment and enthusiasm” (p. 302). Teachers therefore have a “responsibility to educate parents in their roles as partners in the learning process” (Jacobson, 2006, p. 360). For young children especially, this generally includes some degree of supervision. Agay (2004) suggests that “music lessons are a three-way effort by teacher, student, and parents” (p. 489). However, Lang (1998) cautions that some parents make the mistake of anticipating “the swift emergence of a brilliant virtuoso in a short span of time” (p. 9).

Studio teachers, as with all teachers, have a professional responsibility to keep abreast of current development with respect to both their art form and pedagogy. As Creech (2010) puts it, they must “be aware of the changing pedagogical approaches and professional values and practices ... [and keep up with] professional development opportunities” (p. 310).

Section 2: Establishing essentials: avoiding and addressing faults

Hofmann (1910) argues that “nothing is more dangerous for the development of a talent than a bad foundation” and that “bad habits acquired from an ignorant teacher” can be very difficult to address (p. 140). Moss (1989) suggests that the ability to spot errors is sometimes a reflection of teaching experience, and this “must be swift and ... accurately diagnosed” (p. 77). As Last (1966) says, “the teacher of the beginner lays” good groundwork and builds “the foundations for the pianist and musician of tomorrow” (p. xii).

Mistakes that must be addressed from the beginning include rhythmic problems, reading skills, poor finger and hand positions, bad posture, and so on. For example, Reeves (1955) and Klingenstein (2009) argue that among the most important skills needed by good musicians is that of keeping an accurate tempo. In similar vein, Schaum and Cupp (1987) stress that “one of the most valuable skills that can be passed on to students is the ability to read notes fluently” (p. 64). Baker-Jordan (2004) advises that “technical training for any beginner starts with understanding what constitutes a good hand shape” (p. 100). In discussing this also, Reeves (1955) adds that there should be no “depression at the wrist” (p. 25), the fingers must not be too flat, and “the nail-joint [must not] bend inwards, giving a double-jointed effect” (p. 26). Hambourg (1922), Reeves (1955), Tankard (1966), and Newman (1984) draw attention to the importance of the student being comfortably seated, with body

weight appropriately spread on the bench and legs and heels firmly placed on the floor (or a stool). Klingenstein (2009) stresses that teachers must pay attention to the height of the piano seat: one fixed level will not suit all. Slenczynska (1976) argues that, from the start, “relaxation and alertness are necessary to all physical effort” and that this must be taught correctly (p. 110). In this context, Giesecking and Leimer, (1972) postulate that “All superfluous movements are injurious” and that is exactly what we all must avoid (p. 12).

Some mistakes made by students when practising could have been avoided with an astute teacher. Hambourg (1922) suggests that these are the result of “careless tuition [and can be] very difficult to eradicate” (p. 56). Novice teachers especially need to be aware of the harm they can cause by not paying due attention to basic fundamentals from the very beginning of piano lessons. This must be followed through in the advice the teacher gives for practising between lessons. Bolton (1953) says that students must leave the lesson knowing how “to use [their] own ears, judgment, reason, and feeling” (p. 28). Foldes (1964) argues that “Interpretation of great music requires” a basis of a solid foundation together with “a solid and well-founded technique ... There is no short cut” (p. 15). According to Booth (1971), “our aim must be to make them ultimately independent. We begin to do this almost in the very beginning. As each scrap of knowledge becomes absorbed the pupil is taught how to use it when alone” (p. 31). Mistakes committed during the week between lessons can compound. Varro (1997) stresses the importance of students becoming “more self-reliant” in their practice sessions (p. 7).

Waterman (1983) addresses the essential nature of tone-production from the earliest lessons. This, she says, “comes ... from having the right sound in your mind so that you can recognise it when you hear it”, therefore the teacher must always encourage “the student to assess whether a particular sound he is producing matches the sound he is aiming for” (p. 15). Bonetti (2002) says that “what you press is what you get” (p. 92). Giesecking and Leimer (1972) refer to the importance of focusing on “exact tone quality, tone duration and tone strength” (p. 10). This entails the development of acute listening skills from the beginning: students must learn to “judge if their physical motions are achieving the desired musical goals. ... Students need to be continually engaged in active listening” (Klingenstein, 2009, p. 207). Goodkind (2004) says that “From the earliest lessons, the ear must become involved”, to which she adds, “By listening intently and actively, it becomes increasingly clear what each tone is doing” (p. 163). Foldes (1964) argues: “Only by keeping our ears and eyes always wide open will we be able later on to criticize our own playing” (p. 12).

Pedalling also depends on the development of acute listening skills. Giesecking and Leimer (1972) suggest that “A knowledge of pedal effects and careful ear control, will gradually make us sensitive to pedaling. ... Since the ear must decide in this case”, training is needed to develop sensitive hearing (p. 126). This underscores the ongoing importance of aural training in every lesson; as Last (1966) says, it “is an essential part of the piano lesson in the early stages” (p. 52). To this she adds, “strangely enough, many quite advanced pianists never appear to listen to themselves. ... By listening to simple phrases played by the teacher, or by playing them himself, he will discover that a mere handful of notes can be played in a number of different ways” (p. 53).

Of course, issues such as those discussed imply a competent technique. At the same time it must always be remembered that technique is the “Servant of Music” (Bolton, 1953, p. 58). Reeves (1955) defines technique as being “the most efficient use of fingers, hands, arms, and even feet in the use of pedals, in order to translate a pre-conceived idea ... into actual sounds at the keyboard” (p. 24). Ching (1958) attributes Rachmaninoff as saying that “Without technique there can be no interpretation” (p. 20). Collins (1986) describes it as “the ability to play a piece of music ... [and] to consistently produce beautiful piano music” (p. 17). Hambourg (1922) says that technique is essential if one wants “to arrive at the summit of interpretation” (p. 21).

Novice teachers will quickly become aware that concentration in a lesson (and during practice sessions) can be a problem. But, as Lang (1998) argues, “The power of concentration is essential in the training and development of a pianist. Undeniably, this is the one ingredient most often lacking in the young student and frequently in the mature pupil, as well” (p. 42). Gordon (1995) encourages teachers to “create conditions conducive to good concentration” to enable a student “to build up a concentration habit” (p. 68).

Finally, it is important that teachers consider the dominant individual learning style of each student. This can help to avoid many problems in learning. Many writers have written extensively on three particular learning modes: visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic (Campbell, 1991; Camp, 1992; Coats, 2006; Klingenstein, 2009; Mark & Madura, 2010). Those who tend to favour the visual mode use their eyes to “watch what the hands are doing” (Jacobson, 2006, p. 33) and are generally good at reading a music score and love to do written work. Visually oriented students react strongly to “facial expressions and body movement” (Klingenstein, 2009, p. 134), and if playing from memory, can imagine the printed score easily. Students who favour the auditory mode are principally aural learners (Jacobson, 2006; Klingenstein, 2009). They learn best when listening to explanations given by the teacher, have a capacity for ‘inner

hearing', and a propensity to learning from hearing a live demonstration or a recording; they prefer to play by ear (Klingenstein, 2009). Further, they tend to recollect things verbally, and when playing might "close their eyes and listen as they play" (Jacobson, 2006, p. 33). Kinaesthetic learners use an 'action' approach. They 'feel' movement in their bodies, and will feel their way around the keyboard as distinct from needing to constantly be looking at the notes (Jacobson, 2006). The physicality of playing the piano is stronger than their visual or aural sense (Klingenstein, 2009). It must be stressed that whilst students tend to favour one of these three learning modes, they still engage the other two to varying degrees. Whilst it follows that "lessons should include activities and styles that will meet the needs of all students" (Jacobson, 2006, p. 33), teachers should endeavour to develop all three modes. Teachers can maximize or enrich the learning experience by ensuring that students engage in "seeing the music, hearing the music, and moving to the music" (Coats, 2006, p. 15). To teach primarily using the learning mode that is the student's weakest will almost invariably lead to learning difficulties.

Section 3: Teacher knowledge and skills

Campbell (1991) postulates that piano or studio "teachers are the musical agents, the models, and the motivating forces for their students", adding that one-on-one teaching "offers the greatest potential for intensive and highly individualised music learning" (p. 276). As such, piano teachers have a great responsibility to be as well equipped for this task as possible. Learning to teach the piano is an acquired skill that "requires special study, aptitude, application, and expertise" (Bastein, 1995, p. vii). Not surprisingly, because of the broad spectrum of teachers in any field, teaching standards vary greatly. With regard to studio teachers, many have little or no training before commencing to teach, and their qualifications in music and in teaching cover a broad spectrum. The problem is worldwide, with private studio teachers generally not being required to have any form of certification before being allowed to teach. Bridges (1992) has summed it up by arguing that the important role of studio teachers "is not generally matched by ... [their] training, educational qualifications and certification" (p. 90). Certainly, this is the case in Malaysia. It should not be surprising that where there is a lack of "educational standards, no legal licensing and no mandatory certification processes" (Jacobson, 2006, p. 3) studio teachers tend to be regarded more as providing a service than as professional educators. Some countries, but not Malaysia, have made inroads into addressing the problem.

But the success of this process comes down to the individual teacher, experience, training, and a genuine interest in children and teaching. Unfortunately, some teachers still “perpetuate old fashioned conservatory approaches to instruction” and represent the “teaching as I was taught (or mis-taught) syndrome” (Lyke, 1987, p. 9), thus highlighting again the need for adequate training and certification. Competence as a pianist alone is not enough: good teachers must also have a strong knowledge of pedagogy and, in addition to having them themselves, be able to instil in their students “critical thinking skills of conceptualizing, analyzing, evaluating, [and] problem solving” (Coats, 2006, p. 4).

As far as qualifications are concerned, numerous writers have argued for their importance (Pearce, 1924; Lovelock, 1965; Terwilliger, 1965; Lyke, 1987; Bastein, 1995; Jacobson, 2006; and Klingenstein, 2009). It is of course unfortunate that “there are some private teachers who appear to possess minimum professional training but who continue to teach” (Terwilliger, 1965, p. 106). Teachers have the ability to “make or break a young pianist” (Bastein, 1995, p. 5). But qualifications of themselves do not necessarily make a good teacher. Ongoing professional development is essential – with respect to pianistic skills, musical skills, and a knowledge of pedagogy. Schaum and Cupp (1987) argue, for example, that “The dedicated teacher never stops searching for ways of self-improvement” (p. 3), adding, that to be dedicated and proficient in teaching “involves a constant process of learning from which one never graduates” (p. 18). Similarly, Abeles, Hoffer and Klotman (1984) argue that a competent teacher must seek “many opportunities both formal and informal, for improving his performance as a musician and teacher and this process never ceases” (p. 327). But, as Lovelock (1965) observes, it is not simply a matter of having appropriate knowledge and skills and keeping abreast of developments in the field, but being able to apply them: “The basic problem facing the young and inexperienced teacher is how to apply what he has already learnt of the theory of teaching in a practical and effective manner” (p. 6). This might entail attending conferences, seminars, workshops, master classes, and performances, as well as professional reading or more formal study (Lovelock, 1936; Abeles, Hoffer & Klotman, 1984; Lyke, 1987; Schaum & Cupp, 1987; Mark & Madura, 2010). To this must be added the importance of teachers keeping abreast of technology pertaining to their art form and to teaching itself. As Mark and Madura (2010) comment, it has the potential for being “an effective tool for enhancing teaching and musical experiences” (p. 109).

Piano teachers, as with all teachers, must be good communicators, not only with their students, but also their students’ parents (Terwilliger, 1965; Ahrens & Atkinson, 1966; Highet, 1972; Abeles, Hoffer & Klotman, 1984; Schaum & Cupp, 1987; Harris & Crozier, 2000;

Watson, 2009). Being able to communicate effectively with children entails an understanding of them from a number of perspectives: psychological, emotional, social, background, interests, and aptitude; this again highlights the need for teachers having appropriate pedagogical training. Derville (1970) expresses it as “(a) the necessity for using common sense in the application of psychology to teaching, and (b) the importance of treating each child as an individual” (p. iii). Mark and Madura (2010) suggest that in order to be successful, teachers have to acquire knowledge on “child development, music learning theories ... and individual differences in learning style and ability” (p. 73). Zimmerman (1987) says that for teaching to be effective it has to “be based on psychological principles of learning ... through the lens of growth and development” of children (p. 66).

The importance of the teacher’s personality should not be underestimated (Booth, 1971; Lyke, 1987; Moss, 1989; Bastein, 1995; Varro, 1997; Agay, 2004). Agay (2004) comments it is important to have, “A warm and inspiring *personality* conducive to easy, natural and constructive communication with the student” (p. 6). Bastein (1995) says that teachers should “generate as positive a personality as possible in working with students” (p. 9). He argues, further, that there are some features of personality that “distinguish a brilliant teacher from a mediocre one” (Bastein, 1995, p. 3). Varro (1997) writes on the importance of a student’s and teacher’s personality being well-matched. In another sense, it is the teacher’s personality that, to some degree, will decide on the methodological approach used: “Instruction ... is largely dependent on the teacher’s personality” (Bastein, 1995, p. 3). Not surprisingly, a quality of teachers that many writers discuss is patience (Lovelock, 1937; Terwilliger, 1965; Booth, 1971; Moss, 1989; Bastein, 1995; Varro, 1997). Bolton (1953), Lovelock (1965), Moss (1989) and others extend it to “Humor, enthusiasm and patience” (Moss, 1989, p. 2).

The importance of encouragement as a teaching tool is recognised by many writers on piano pedagogy (Lovelock, 1937; Ahrens & Atkinson, 1966; Lang 1998). This can take many forms, including praise and reward. An astute teacher will ascertain what forms of encouragement work best for individual students. They must “recognize that each student is an individual personality with different musical goals and limitations in ability” (Schaum & Cupp (1987, p. 3); some will need more encouragement than others.

Colwell (1969) argues that the “progress of each individual ... will depend upon background, aptitude, interest, private study, and home cooperation ...” (p. 21). Consideration of factors such as these is important as, of course, is teaching at a rate that the child can understand and absorb. Some piano educators argue that, in the process, teachers must teach

students to teach themselves, even in the early years. Lovelock (1937) refers to the role of self-discovery, suggesting that what the student “discovers for himself ... he will remember” (p. 2). Booth (1971), in arguing for the need to encourage a degree of independence in learning from the start, suggests “it is a good rule never to tell them anything we can make them tell us, and never to do for them what they could do for themselves” (p. 31). Varro (1997) advises, “The more self-reliant one can make the pupil, the better” (p. 7).

Varro (1997) comments, “the qualities that make for a competent teacher-educator must be rounded out by certain artistic qualities” (p. 8). The obverse also applies when a performing artist teaches: their artistic skills must be rounded out by competent teaching skills. But, as Varro (1997) observes, “one could perhaps differentiate between the *artist*-teacher and the *teacher*-artist, since the two qualities are rarely of equal excellence in one person” (p. 8). Lovelock (1936) argues that “The ability to impart knowledge to others ... is certainly most difficult to acquire” (p. 8).

In addition to all of the knowledge and skills required of studio teachers, some still experience difficulty because of poor organisational and business skills (Baker-Jordon, 2004; Jacobson, 2006; Klingenstein, 2009). But to conclude, when considering essential teacher knowledge and skills we must keep in mind that “The primary purpose of the private teacher is to make music and the keyboard an enjoyable and rewarding experience for as many students as possible, regardless of their musical abilities” (Schaum & Cupp, 1987, p. 15). Or, as Coats (2006) puts, “Our goal as music teachers is to prepare students to understand music and to skillfully play an instrument so they can enjoy music for the rest of their lives” (p.1). With respect to teaching itself, Reeves (1955) suggests that “Every new pupil adds something to the stock of our knowledge of how to tackle a particular problem in teaching” (p. 84).

Section 4: Practice, Sight-reading, Musicianship skills, Group teaching

Practice

Enoch (1974) stresses that it is the duty of every teacher “To teach a child how to practice” (p. 75). She went on to criticize those teachers who expect their students to “go home and practice this ... with no instructions given as to how it should be tackled, and no questions asked later as to how it was carried out” (Enoch, 1987, p. 162). A study conducted by Barry (2000) “revealed that student practice habits were influenced to a limited degree by their teacher’s advice, but the most powerful influence was the teacher’s instruction style. What the teachers actually did during the lessons (e.g., the teacher demonstrating a particular

technique or having the student try a particular approach) had a more profound influence upon their students' practice than what they said" (Barry & Hallam, 2002, p. 158). As Moss (1989) says, "A demonstration is worth a thousand words" (p. 78). But research conducted by Hallam (1997) "found that 60 per cent of beginners, novices and advanced students when learning a new piece left errors uncorrected ... that once made tended to be permanent and were left uncorrected" (Jorgensen & Hallam, 2009, p. 269). Giesecking and Leimer (1972) opine that the teacher is performing an inestimable role when "he untiringly points out to the pupil the best way to work" (p. 46).

Concentration and attentiveness are important elements in practicing. Varro (1997) points out "Most beginners ... are unable to concentrate on any one thing at a time because their attention is diffused for lack of the proper automatisms. ... some of the elements of practicing must be made to function automatically, if the requisite economy of attention is to be achieved" (p. 50). Lovelock (1937) stresses that with beginners practice sessions should be relatively short, but a few times a day. A number of other writers also caution against beginners practising for too long a period (Hambourg, 1922; Cooke, 1948; Tankard, 1966; Ahrens & Atkinson, 1966; King, 1968; Giesecking & Leimer, 1972; Bruxner, 1972; Lyke, 1987; Schaum & Cupp, 1987). As much as possible, young children must learn to avoid monotony and tediousness in their practice (Langley, 1963); at the onset of boredom, changing to another piece or another task such as sight-reading can assist in this. Tayler (1913) argues that when concentration wanes "you lose the power of forming and retaining clear impressions, you will begin to make 'new mistakes'. ... This means that it is time to call a halt and rest, if only for a few seconds" (p. 8). Langley (1963) says that from the beginning stages of learning students must appreciate "the practical advantage of quality being more important than quantity" (p. 42). As Jorgensen and Hallam (2009) stress, "there are substantial differences in the relationship between the quantity of practice and attainment suggesting that attainment is not exclusively a question of quantity of practice, but also of quality, which is a result of individual engagement with and knowledge of practice strategies" (p. 266). This underscores the importance of students being properly acquainted with good practice techniques from the beginning.

With regard to specific aspects of practice, Hambourg (1922) emphasizes "great attention to detail ... avoidance of over-fatigue, both mental and physical" (p. 16). Last (1966), Booth (1971), Klingenstein (2009) and Lyke (1987) emphasise the necessity of ensuring at the start of learning a piece that fingerings are correct, students know the exact location of the notes, and rhythmic accuracy. Varro (1997) stresses that the tempo should not be too fast "lest your

fingers get ahead of your mind” (p. 54). Bruxner (1972) advises students “to go from slow to fast by playing fast for very small stretches of time, then pausing or playing slowly again, and finally another burst of speed” (p. 23). Some writers suggest that the teacher devise a practice plan and goals for students that will “focus the student’s attention and effort, thereby increasing the effectiveness of his practice” (Baker-Jordan, 2004, p. 115). Gordon (1995) draws attention to the importance of students identifying problem areas and proceeding to work on “one aspect of a piece” (p. 66) at a time. Booth (1971) puts it as:

- (a) Repeat only the right thing.
- (b) Practise slowly in order to be able really to listen ...
- (c) Never too much at a time. (p. 78)

Baker-Jordan (2004) emphasizes that pieces need to be “divided into sections that can be practiced as individual pieces with their own separate weekly goals” (p. 115). Bolton (1957) refers to the need for “planning our work ahead, and *always having some definite aim*” (p. 30). At the bottom of all of this is the advice of Booth (1971) that “one wrong repetition can do intense harm, whereas a correct repetition adds much on the credit side” (p. 77), and Enoch (1987) that “One of the most important aspects of practicing is to learn to listen to one’s own performance, and you must start to develop this at the onset of lessons” (p. 162).

Sight-reading

Bolton (1957) is straight to the point on this topic: “the standard of reading at the present day is deplorable! Don’t neglect it! Give it a place in your daily practice, and you will save time in the long run” (p. 23). It is “a skill which offers a student access to all music literature; a skill through which he can acquaint himself with any composition, unaided by a teacher” (Deutsch, 1959, p. xii). Langley (1963) says it “is one of the most important branches of musical training, and often one of the most neglected. Unfortunately, it is frequently disregarded until an examination demands it” (p. 38).

Lang (1998) defines sight-reading as “the ability to read a piece without having heard or seen the music previously” (p. 86). Chronister (1987) points out however that students must “be provided ways to develop a quick and accurate response to notation. Sight-reading will not develop on its own” (p. 124). It is a skill that, as Gordon (1995) says, must be “a regular part of instruction at the beginning levels ... [regardless of] whether highly gifted in this direction or not” (p. 41). Numerous other writers also recommend students developing this skill in the

early lessons (Bolton, 1957; Langley, 1963; Newman, 1984; Chronister, 1987; Gordon, 1995; Bastein, 1995; Lang, 1998; Jacobson, 2006; Klingenstein, 2009). For example, Newman (1984) advises that in sight-reading “elementary material should be a main ingredient in his early training” (p. 19). It is a skill that, as Gordon (1995) says, must be “a regular part of instruction at the beginning levels ... [regardless of] whether highly gifted in this direction or not” (p. 41). Agay (2004) emphasises the complex nature of sight-reading:

To read and play music at first sight is the result of a rather complex series of body functions:

1. the eyes see the note picture;
2. the brain interprets the received image on two levels, aural and tactile, and accordingly transmits the proper muscular impulses for the desired keyboard contact;
3. the hands and fingers play, thus transforming the visual and aural impression into sound. (p. 197)

To which she adds:

the eye does not focus on individual notes, but rather on a group of notes, which by virtue of certain characteristics (pitch contour, rhythmic pattern, chordal design, etc.) forms a recognizable visual pattern and musical unit. ... the eyes must move not only horizontally from left to right, but also, to a lesser extent, vertically, in order to take in the notes and symbols of the two staves, chords, and polyphonic textures. (p. 198)

Following this, the pianist has to respond physically and play on the keyboard what is on the printed score. Arguably, the task is more complicated than that of reading words.

In teaching sight-reading, Klingenstein (2009), emphasizes that when theory work is stressed “the more effortlessly students will be able to recognize chord inversions and identify harmonic progressions” the easier the skill will be to learn (p. 221). Booth (1971) says, simply, that a good sight-reader must be able to apply a “knowledge of harmony” (p. 113). Writers such as Newman (1984) write on the importance of students learning “to keep their eyes on the music, even during leaps” (p.22) and “to look ahead *deliberately* in the score” (p. 23). Slenczynska (1976) draws attention to the importance of having a strong sense of keyboard geography: “It is imperative right from the start to learn to read without looking at the keyboard, similar to the touch system in typing” (p. 117). Reeves (1955) notes that a

“facility in sight-reading depends so much upon the ability to read notes and chords by interval, and in estimating the distance between one key and another at the keyboard, without necessarily having to look at the fingers” (p. 59). Fisher (2010) writes of the importance of students learning to “read successive notes in a pattern using intervallic and directional movement. ... Of course, being able to name notes is a critical, fundamental step in the reading process, but one must go beyond a pure ‘note-naming’ approach to the reading in order to become a confident, fluid reader” (p. 127). Cooke (1948) advises “Cultivate the habit of reading not individual notes but, in so far as you can, groups of notes. Read ahead as far as you safely can. Don’t bother about fingering at all” (p. 139). Writers such as Reeves (1955), Tankard (1966), and Newman (1984) suggest that sight-reading involves some form of memory in that a player has to read ahead, remember, and execute what has been read whilst, at the same time, reading the next group of notes.

Musicianship skills in general can assist greatly in sight-reading, pre-eminent of these skills being sensitive listening, which is based on acute training of the ear. Agay (2004) argues that good sight-reading skills are one important indicator of “sound musicianship” (p. 197). Lang (1998), encouragingly, says that “sight-reading is a skill that one can work on in order to develop. ... start with music that is at least two grade levels easier than your current repertoire” (p. 86). For students who are weak, Gordon (1995) advises them “to go back to a *beginning level*” and read a lot of piano literature from level one upwards until security in notation and rhythm are easily managed (p. 43). Music educators such as Agay (2004) and Klingenstein (2009) suggest that proficient sight-readers:

- Spend far less time learning assigned pieces
- Are more readily able to play favorite music just for fun
- Are more likely to be lifelong learners at the piano. (p. 217)

Some writers speak of the usefulness of duet playing for the development of sight-reading skills (Booth, 1971; Taylor, 1981; Bastein, 1995). Cooke (1948) also believes in the benefits of playing in groups, and accompanying singers or instrumentalists. In these situations – and for sight-reading in general – the advice of Klingenstein (2009) should be heeded by all: “Although it is desirable for students to strive for complete note accuracy ... accurate rhythm becomes the most important indicator of success. The good sight-player is able to read without stopping or delaying beats, even if notes are missed” (p. 217).

Finally, Bullard (2010) tries to put the issue of sight-reading into some perspective for teachers: “We all know that the skill of playing at sight is one of the most useful – and time-saving – for any musician, but helping our pupils to progress with their sight-reading, rather than merely undertaking tests in it, is a challenge to which there is no easy answer” (p. 6). Whilst there is no easy answer, the collective advice of writers discussed in this section has great merit.

Musicianship skills

Bolton (1953) argues that without a highly developed sense of “Musicianship, the true appreciation of Music can never exist ... [it entails] perceiving and recreating ... the inspiration behind the symbols on the printed page and the sounds they signify” (p. 35). Regelski (2009) suggests that “Musicianship and its meanings are logical starting places for any free-ranging exploration of music learning and teaching” (p. 1). Varro (1997) adds to this: “The development of musicianship must go hand in hand with pianistic training from the very beginning, that is, the student must always *understand* what he is playing” (p. 40).

Moss (1989) argues that musicianship entails three essential skills: reading, listening, and retaining, that is, cultivating the memory. “These three skills ... cannot be separated. Each enhances the others in the building of musical knowledge. The question is how to practise and master them” (p. 80). Bolton (1953) puts it as: musicianship “comprises all that enables us to listen, read, memorize and understand music” (p. 34). She cautions however: “we must never forget that though it is contributory it is only secondary to *Music* itself. Music is greater than Musicianship in the same way that Literature is greater than Reading, Writing, and the rules of syntax. We must not confuse the means with the end” (p. 35).

The importance of developing good music reading skills – and, in particular, rhythmic and melodic reading skills – are advocated strongly by a legion of writers (Lovelock, 1965; Enoch, 1974; Waterman, 1983; Newman, 1984; Moss, 1989; Richards, 1987; Jacobson, 2006; Berger, 2010). This was reinforced in the earlier discussion of sight-reading.

Many writers too stress the importance of developing memorisation skills from the earliest lessons (Hambourg, 1922; Giesecking & Leimer, 1972; Newman, 1984). To quote Newman (1984) children must be taught to visually and mentally “take in as much of the notation as possible at a glance” and then – as has been seen with sight-reading – “recording mentally what is coming while playing *from memory* what was previously recorded mentally” (p. 23). Whilst opinions differ among pianists as to the importance of playing complete works from memory, there is nevertheless an element of memory in all playing. In the early stages

children tend to rely on tactile or kinaesthetic memory, but, ideally, this must progress to include “melodic and harmonic memory ... as the mind begins to recall the actions of the learning process and retains the framework of the music” which is often called an analytic memory (Moss, 1989, p. 84). A secure performance from memory relies on as many memories as possible, the most unreliable generally being the tactile or kinaesthetic.

Many argue, as does Skaggs (2004), that a “knowledge of theory is a precondition of musical understanding and competence” (p. 147). Goodkind (2004) argues that “The time to begin is at the very first lesson” (p. 157). To avoid it being “a rather dreary experience” she urges teachers “to link the study of theory, in a practical keyboard-harmony program, with every piece of music played. Experience has taught us that students respond most enthusiastically to abstract fundamentals when they discover their relevance to the music itself” (p. 157). Similar sentiments about treating the elements that comprise musicianship separately and without reference to the keyboard – or listening – are expressed by writers such as Lovelock (1937), Langley (1963), and Lyke (1987).

Increasingly, the development of improvisational skills, even for beginners, are being advocated. “Great personal pleasure and satisfaction can be derived from the musical exploration and experimentation involved. Not to be underestimated is the valuable ear training and keyboard harmony experience involved with improvising and chord study” (Schaum & Cupp, 1987, p. 127). This is reinforced by Rabinof (2004): “Improvising gives a superior tactile relationship to the keyboard, an aural awareness, and a sense of ‘at homeness’ in any key, better memory and sight-reading ability, a gift for compositional analysis, security, and poise. But above all else, it enhances his musicianship” (p. 228).

Varro (1997) advises introducing beginners to “elementary exercises in keyboard harmony ... very early”, adding: “By means of well-planned exercises at the keyboard (which require only a few minutes of the piano lesson and can be spread out over several years) ... [the student] becomes familiar with the simplest elements of harmonic thinking” (p. 40). Another skill that some writers recommend be developed from an early stage is transposition at the keyboard. This will “enable the student to understand from the onset of lessons that melodies may be played with a different set of keys at a different pitch from the original, requiring only the reproduction of the shape of the tune” (Enoch, 1987, p. 125). Booth (1971) believes that transposition “is a good aid to identification of a movable key-centre” (p. 63). Central to such keyboard skills, and the development of improvisational skills, is the need to develop a student’s listening skills. “Listening lies at the heart of all music-making and having a good musical ear enhances every aspect of musicianship” (Scaife, 2011, p. 15). In the

process, students will be better aided in developing their ability “to listen to and judge their own playing for accuracy, musical content and quality of sound” (Jacobson, 2006, p. 226). Bennett (1969) puts it as the student’s need to develop “discrimination in the finer points of listening. ... Most students hear, but do not listen to, what they practice. The best students are those who have learned *how* to listen” (p. 7).

Analysis is also an essential element of musicianship. It is a skill that must be developed in all performers, even in the early stages. Although a distinct aspect of musicianship, it is discussed by many writers with reference to memorization. Agay (2004), for example, in espousing certain benefits of memorisation, writes of the importance of students seeing a work’s “distinctive patterns, images, and relationships” (p. 220); as seen earlier, this is quite different from merely relying on a visual or kinaesthetic memory. Klingenstein (2009) also discusses the importance of analysis in the context of memorisation, suggesting not only that:

- Memorisation fosters a more complete understanding of the total content of a composition.
- Memorisation enhances musicality. A carefully memorized piece has been studied far more thoroughly than an unmemorised piece, allowing the performer to become more intimately involved with the musical content. (p. 166)

Some writers have criticised teachers for their relative neglect of the teaching of musicianship skills. “Instrumental teachers are frequently berated for spending too much time focused on issues of technique and accuracy at the expense of musicianship” (Hallam & Creech, 2010, p. 93). Or, as Newman (1984) puts it, some musicianship skills “fail to be cultivated at the lesson because their importance to learning and performance is not understood, because they are left to general theory and musicianship classes where the special problems of piano playing can hardly receive adequate attention ... or simply because the teacher himself is deficient in them” (p. 5). In this category he includes ensemble playing. Bolton (1953) goes so far as saying that without appropriate skills in all areas of musicianship a full “appreciation of music can never exist” (p. 35).

Group teaching

In recent decades, there has been an increase in the number of teachers who favour group teaching for certain aspects of piano tuition. Certainly, this has been the case in

Malaysia. In some instances group teaching is extended to piano lessons themselves; however, with private or studio teachers it is more common for group lessons to be provided in relation to the development of musicianship and it is in this regard that group teaching is discussed here. As Stevens (1988) suggests, group lessons can promote skills such as “keyboard harmony, accompanying, ensemble playing and sight reading” (p. 2). In discussing music lessons, Mursell (1954) says “An individual will do many tasks better when he does them in a group ... than when he does them alone” (p. 143). Lyke (1987) claims that group lessons “fill in the musical gaps with activities the private lesson leaves little time for” (p. 16). Klingenstein (2009) notes that group lessons

- Provide an interactive, social aspect to music
- Allow students to learn from each other and feel motivated by peers to try their best
- Develop better listening skills
- Offer an ideal forum for working collaboratively on ensemble music
- Increase the student’s enjoyment while studying. (p. 310)

Similar comments have been made by others, including Lovelock (1965), Bennett (1969), Enoch (1974), Lyke (1987), Bigler and Lloyd-Watts (1998), Baker-Jordan (2004), Jacobson (2006), Klingenstein (2009), and Hallam and Creech (2010). Group teaching also provides an environment in which children learn “to accept criticism from each other” and gain self-assurance (Skaggs, 2004, p. 267). Further, as Lovelock (1937) explains, “each pupil has the opportunity of hearing the teacher’s criticisms of the work of the others, and thus can learn from their faults” (p. 138).

Some writers comment on the usefulness of group lessons in countering a sense of ‘loneliness’ that pianists experience compared, for example, to those learning an orchestral instrument.

The piano is a lonely instrument, and it may be that the lack of stimulus derived from learning with others of the same age accounts in part for the enormous fall-out of pupils after a few years. The group-lesson combats this loneliness, and to a certain extent compensates the pianist for the lack of communal music-making so much enjoyed by those who play orchestral instruments. (Enoch, 1974, p. 1)

Jacobson (2006) refers to:

- Group lessons develop poise and other performance skills when the student plays for others.
- Group lessons broaden students' musical understanding by hearing and studying a greater variety of music.
- Group lessons develop communication skills and the ability to work in a group.
- Group lessons motivate students through healthy competition. (p. 269)
- Group lessons bring out the best in students through the challenge of cooperation.
- Group lessons develop supportive camaraderie. (p. 270)

Baker-Jordan (2004) draws attention to the possibility of students getting “much more fun and excitement from learning in a group whose members stimulate and energize one another” (p. 275).

Many writers argue the importance of the students within a group being appropriately chosen such that they are of a similar age and skill level (Curwen, 1913; Enoch, 1974; Lyke, 1987; Harris & Crozier, 2000; Baker-Jordan, 2004; Skaggs, 2004; Coats, 2006; Jacobson, 2006; Klingenstein, 2009). Jacobson (2006) refers to the need to consider:

- readiness
- maturity
- learning ability
- physical development
- rhythmic development
- aural skills. (p. 273)

To this list Skaggs (2004) adds “talent and interests” (p. 267). Writers also comment on the optimal size of groups, this ranging from two to approximately eight, but some teachers are comfortable with larger group sizes. It is argued that not only does group teaching save time (Curwen, 1913; Bennett, 1969; Enoch, 1974; Harris & Crozier, 2000; Baker-Jordan, 2004; Klingenstein, 2009; Hallam & Creech, 2010) but that it can also be a “more efficient use of teacher time” (Baker-Jordan, 2004, p. 275).

Harris and Crozier (2000) caution that “Ample time must be allowed for preparation, and this will almost certainly need to be significantly greater than in one-to-one teaching. ... potential problems and various ways of overcoming them should be thought out beforehand. Perhaps most important is to ensure that all group members are occupied for the full duration of the lesson” (p. 81). These sentiments are echoed by Enoch (1974), Lyke (1987), Baker-Jordan (2004), and Jacobson (2006). Lyke (1987) stresses also “the value of varied activities in sustaining student interest and attention in class” (p. 16). These activities should include individual and group performances.

Section 5: Music examinations

Learning the piano and other instruments is traditionally associated with music examinations (such as those conducted by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music) – especially in countries that are or were part of the British Commonwealth. In such countries, as Harris and Crozier (2000) state, “There is no denying the great importance attached to examinations” (p. 111). As Bridges (1992) has noted, they became a British export “and they have continued to the present day to perpetuate traditional English practices and methods” (p. 34). She adds that this led, in 1918, to the formation of the Australian Music Examination Board (AMEB): “These AMEB examinations differed hardly at all from their English counterparts ... and they have continued to the present day to perpetuate traditional English practices and methods. In fact, the [AMEB] syllabus itself has become the principal method of teaching music in Australia” (Bridges, 1992, p. 34). The same could be said today in relation to the syllabi of the British examining boards that operate in Malaysia. In discussing the early influence of the British bodies that examined in Australia, Bridges suggested that “British musicians as a group were quite prepared to put up with the stultifying influence of examinations, adapt their teaching to fit in with the system, and even write textbooks which preserved rather than challenged it” (p. 35).

Music examinations are principally a test of a student’s performance and technical ability, but also test various aspects of musicianship, such as aural skills, sight-reading, and general knowledge. In addition to practical examinations, students can take corresponding theory examinations as well as musicianship examinations. Other examinations offered include ensemble and, recently, jazz. At the advanced levels examination bodies offer diploma examinations that certify the attainment of a relatively high skill or performance level, and others that certify a teaching ability.

Ahrens and Atkinson (1966) suggest “that the chief benefits to be derived from examinations and competitions in music are first, the intensive work done in the preparation of the fine and varied type of music required, and second, the value of the criticism and advice which comes to the student from an expert and unbiased examiner or adjudicator” (p. 98). Harris and Crozier (2000) state that many teachers (and parents) see them as “a powerful source of motivation ... a challenge” (p. 111). Coats (2006) puts it that examinations offer students “goals, assessment, and certification of progress at each stage of their development” (p. 67). Somewhat similarly, Taylor (2006) claims that they provide a measure of “success and reassurance that you are on the right road” (p. 9). To this Lovelock (1965) adds “that not only is the candidate being examined, but also *the teacher through the candidate*” (p. 101). As far as the novice teacher is concerned, Lovelock (1965) claims that “examination syllabuses offer a ready-made scheme for a graded course of study which can obviously be of great help to the young and inexperienced teacher” (p. 96).

As has been seen, not all writers, and not all teachers and music pedagogues fully support the music examination system. Even Ahrens and Atkinson (1966), who are strong advocates of the system, caution “that there are undoubtedly a few pupils for whom examinations might not be advantageous. Nervousness caused by some definite illness ... would naturally preclude examination work. It is quite possible, however, for the child to be worked up into a highly nervous condition through the behaviour of well-meaning but unwise parents and teachers” (p. 99). Lovelock (1965) argues that whilst there is nothing intrinsically wrong with examinations, “What is wrong is the misuse, one may even say abuse, of the system by teachers, often egged on and abetted by parents. It is an unfortunate fact ... that some teachers appear to look on the aim of music teaching simply as a matter of preparing pupils for one examination after another – and nothing else” (p. 94). Moss (1989) says it more succinctly: “examinations are not the sole reason for studying music” (p. 88). Harris and Crozier (2000) make a similar point, but do so even more graphically: “Perhaps the most common problem occurs when pupils are fed a diet of exam material to the exclusion of anything else. The teacher who simply presents pupils with one exam after another will cause a kind of musical malnutrition, which in turn may well lead to a stunted musical growth”, adding that “pupils should never be entered for grade exams against their will” (p. 112). Langley (1963) says it even more strongly: “If examinations are forced the nervous tension will usually result in a dislike of music altogether” (p. 67). Last (1966) cautions: “Not every pupil is a suitable examination candidate, and unless examinations can be taken without bother and fuss it is better that they should not be attempted” (p. 147). Finally, Langley (1963) picks-

up the criticism made above by Lovelock (1965) regarding the over-zealous parent: “Unfortunately, many parents are inclined to judge the teacher’s ability by the number of certificates obtained by his pupils” (p. 66).

It needs to be noted that there are some students who do not perform to their best ability in examinations. This requires sensitivity on the part of the teacher (and parents) and “the pupil should never be allowed to feel or develop any feelings of inferiority” (Langley, 1963, p. 67). Last (1966) reminds teachers and parents that “music examinations do not *have* to be taken: but, if they are, there is nothing to be gained, and everything to be lost, in failing them. The child loses confidence ...” (p. 150). Even where students pass, it is essential that teachers use the examination report constructively to further develop a student’s playing, understanding and love of music. Lovelock (1965) urges teachers and parents to remember that when examinations are abused and not used constructively, “music study can never be fun; it tends to be looked upon as a possibly unwelcome extension of school work, directed solely to taking one examination after another and to the acquisition of more and more certificates to be exhibited to admiring relations and friends” (p. 94). Even today, this tends to be far too common.

Finally, to return to Bridges (1992), let hers be the last word:

how can musicians holding academic positions tolerate the existence of a music education system which not only is narrow and out of date but also in many respects violates the very theories, philosophies, and practices they themselves are promoting within their own institutions. This Alice-in-Wonderland situation is all the more absurd when it is realised that among such musicians are a number who actually control the policy of music examination bodies ... And music graduates who become teachers, no matter how cynical they may be about the system, are sooner or later forced to conform with it if their students need to pass the examinations in order to gain entry to tertiary level music courses! (p. 36)

Certainly, these words still resonate when one looks at the Malaysian situation.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

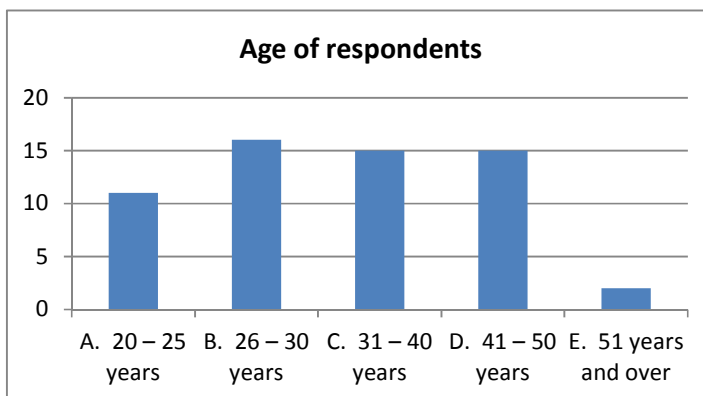
4.1 Questions and Findings from the Survey

As noted previously, the questionnaire comprised 25 questions, (see Appendix 3) some of which had more than one component. What follows is a discussion of these questions.

The first four questions provide demographic details on teachers; the remainder are directly concerned with piano teaching.

Q. 1 Age of Respondents

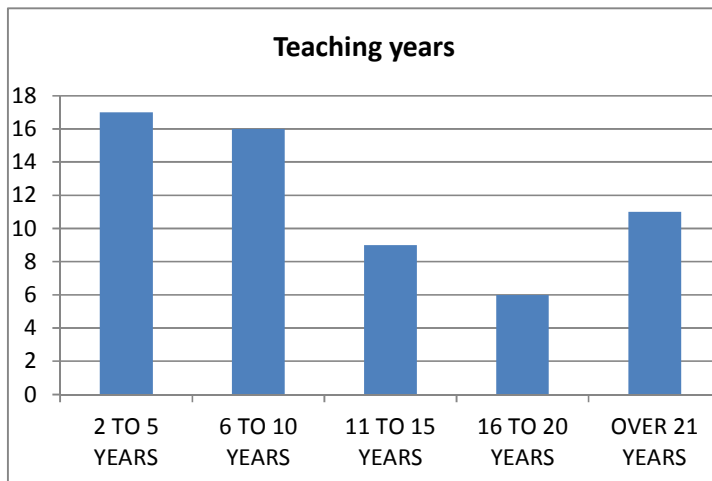
A. 20 – 25 years	11	18.6%
B. 26 – 30 years	16	27.1%
C. 31 – 40 years	15	25.4%
D. 41 – 50 years	15	25.4%
E. 51 years and over	2	3.4%
Total	59	



Over three-quarters (46 or 77.9%) of the teachers were in the age range 26 to 50, with approximately a quarter in each of the ranges 26-30, 31-40 and 41-50. A further 11 (18.6%) were aged between 20-25, and 2 (3.4%) were 51 or older.

Q. 2 Teaching years

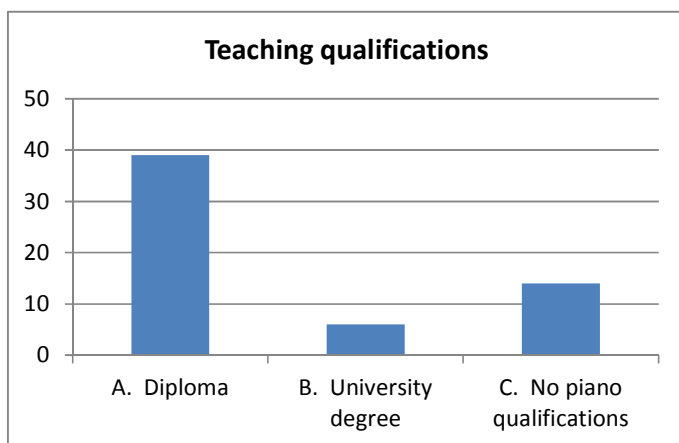
A. 2 to 5 years	17	28.8%
B. 6 to 10 years	16	27.1%
C. 11 to 15 years	9	15.3%
D. 16 to 20 years	6	10.2%
E. 21 years and over	11	18.6%
Total	59	



Over half (33 or 55.9%) had been teaching for between 2 and 10 years. A quarter (15 or 25.5%) had been teaching between 11 and 20 years. The remaining 11 (18.6%) had been teaching for 21 or more years.

Q. 3 Qualifications

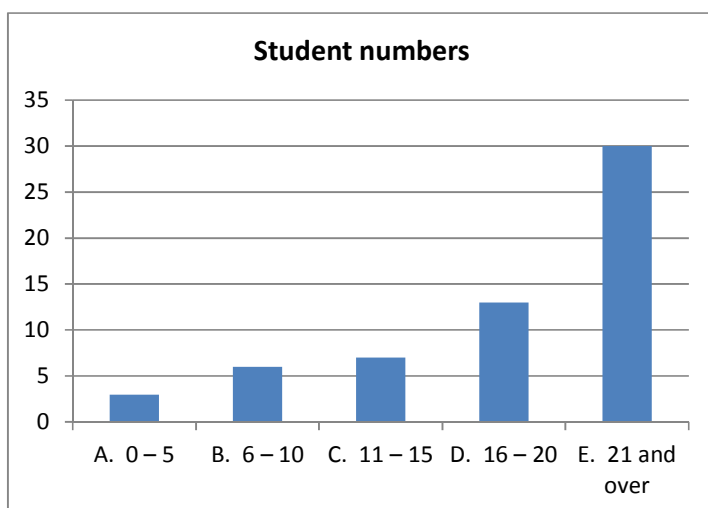
A. Diploma	39	66.1%
B. University degree	6	10.2%
C. No piano qualifications	14	23.7%
Total	59	



Two-thirds (39 or 66.1%) had a Diploma such as that awarded by one of the major examining bodies (e.g., Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, Trinity Guildhall, London College of Music). A further 6 (10.2%) teachers had a university degree, three of them being in music. Almost a quarter (14 or 23.7%) had no music qualification beyond Grade 8 of the examining bodies.

Q. 4 Student numbers

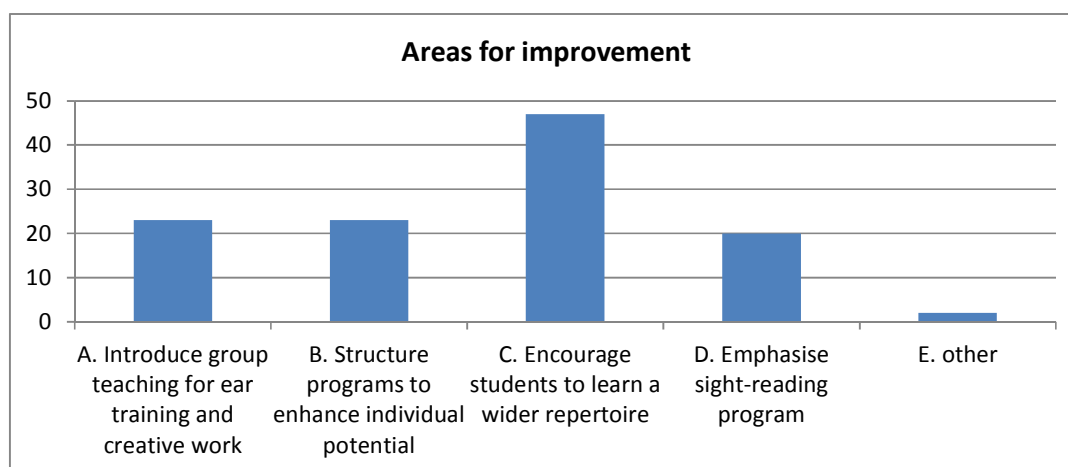
A. 0 – 5	3	5.1%
B. 6 – 10	6	10.2%
C. 11 – 15	7	11.9%
D. 16 – 20	13	22.0%
E. 21 and over	30	50.8%
Total	59	



Half of the teachers (30 or 50.8%) had more than 20 piano students, and almost three-quarters (43 or 72.9%) had 16 or more students. A further 6 teachers (10.2%) had 6-10 students, and the remaining 3 (5.1%) had 5 or less.

Q. 5 Areas for improvement

A. Introduce group teaching for ear training and creative work	23	39.0%
B. Structure programs to enhance individual potential	23	39.0%
C. Encourage students to learn a wider repertoire	47	79.7%
D. Emphasise sight-reading program	20	33.9%
E. Other	2	3.4%
Total	115	

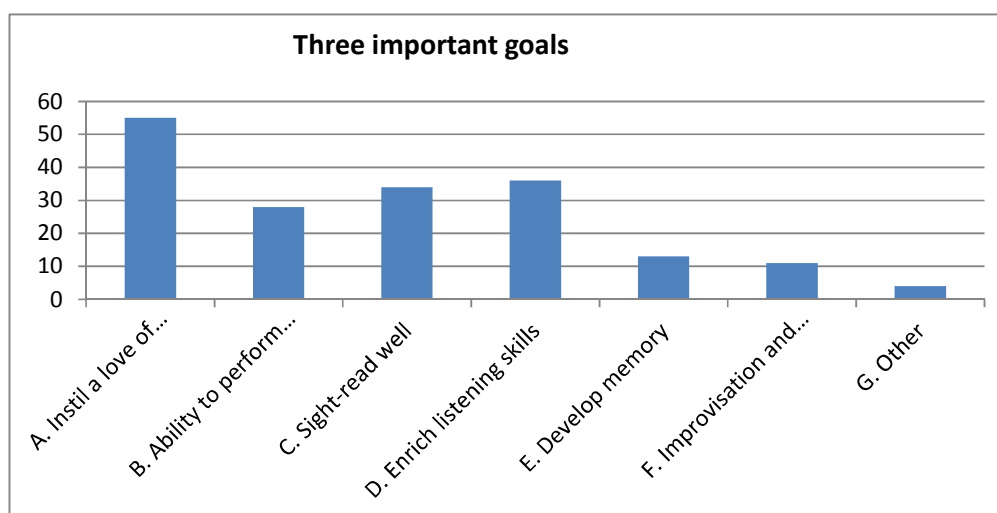


In responding to the question asking them to identify one or more areas of their teaching that they would like to improve, a large majority (47 or 79.7%) highlighted the need to encourage their students to learn a wider repertoire. The importance of students learning a wide repertoire is universally espoused in piano teaching today; it might extend from the pre-Baroque to contemporary compositions and include music from a range of genres, including jazz, blues and modern popular works. Indeed, this breadth is increasingly becoming evident in examination syllabi. Although less strongly identified, 23 (39%) stated their aim of introducing group teaching for ear training and creative work as well as structuring their programs to enhance individual potential. Only slightly fewer (20 or 33.9%) indicated their aim of emphasizing sight-reading. Two teachers (3.4%) specified other areas that they intended to focus on: sight-reading and technique, respectively. What is perhaps most interesting in these results is that teachers clearly were conscious of the need for further

improvement in their teaching and had identified at least one area that they intended to address. Of the 2 people who indicated ‘other’, 1 mentioned technique and the other sight-reading.

Q. 6 The three most important goals for beginner and elementary students

A. Instil a love of playing the piano	55	93.2%
B. Ability to perform well	28	47.5%
C. Sight-read well	34	57.6%
D. Enrich listening skills	36	61.0%
E. Develop memory	13	22.0%
F. Improvisation and composition through creativity	11	18.6%
G. Other	4	6.8%
Total	181	



When asked to identify the three most important goals that they would like to set for their beginner and elementary students, most (55 or 93.2%) indicated instilling a love of playing the piano. It might be a surprise to some that 4 teachers did not rank this in their top three goals.

The importance of enriching listening skills was identified by 36 (61.0%) of the teachers; there are some who would argue that the development of listening skills lies at the heart not only of learning an instrument, but also developing a deep appreciation and understanding of music in general.

A similar number (34 or 57.6%) advocated an ability to sight-read well as one of their most important goals; sight-reading has traditionally been a problematic area in piano

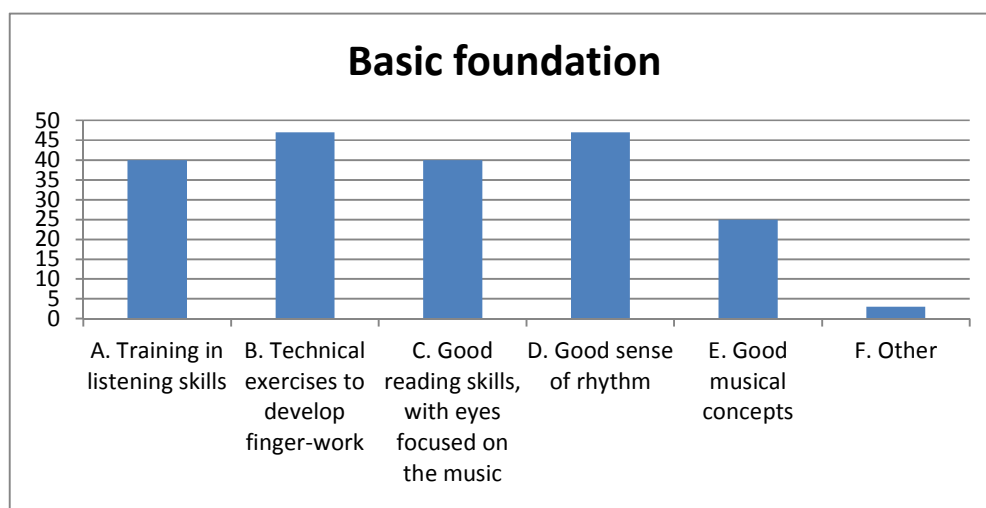
teaching, and such skills have tended to be neglected, despite being tested in examination syllabi. It might be argued that sight-reading is a form of literacy that ‘opens the door’ to students acquaintance with the repertoire in much the same way that reading many books rather than just a few greatly assists children’s linguistic literacy. Despite teachers’ reluctance to emphasise sight-reading, it should be considered as essential in good piano teaching. Twenty eight (47.5%) indicated the ability to perform well.

A strong emphasis on the development of memory was stressed by 13 (22.0%) of the teachers; it is an area that has been the subject of much discussion over many years. There is some indication that today playing from memory is no longer considered to be as essential as it was in the past; indeed, some performers argue that many contemporary scores mitigate against this.

Of importance to 11 (18.6%) teachers was improvisation and composition through creativity; this is an area that has received increasing attention in piano teaching in recent years and, to a somewhat limited extent, in examination syllabi. One problem, perhaps, is that, traditionally, most teachers themselves have not trained in improvisation or extemporisation. Finally, 4 teachers listed under ‘other’: technique; technique and a good hand position; patience to persevere in correcting mistakes; and a good sense of rhythm.

Q. 7 Basic foundation

A. Training in listening skills	40	67.8%
B. Technical exercises to develop finger-work	47	79.7%
C. Good reading skills, with eyes focused on the music	40	67.8%
D. Good sense of rhythm	47	79.7%
E. Good musical concepts	25	42.4%
F. Other	2	3.4%
Total	201	



Not surprisingly, a good rhythmic sense as well as good finger technique were identified by 47 (79.7%) of the teachers as being important in developing a strong foundation for learning the piano. The importance of developing a rhythmic sense is a *sine qua non* in the learning of any instrument. Good finger technique is also vital; at the same time it must be acknowledged that there exist various ‘schools of thought’ regarding what is ideal finger work – and the best means for developing it.

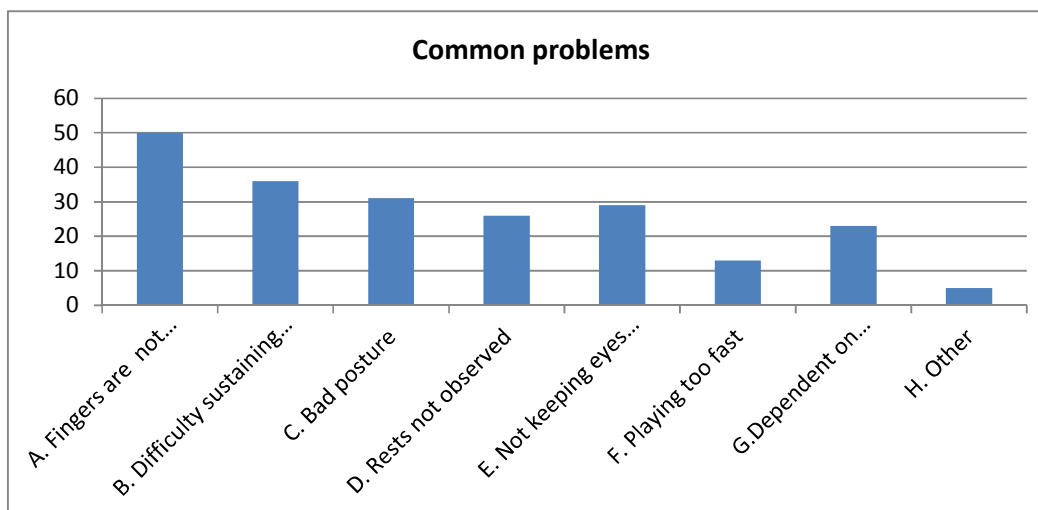
The two areas that were identified next in importance (by 40 teachers or 67.8%) are training in listening skills and the development of good reading skills. The first of these draws attention to the need for systematic aural (ear) training from the beginning; initially this can be developed through singing, clapping and recognizing intervals. Pianists, unlike string players, do not have to ‘find’ their notes: they are ‘fixed’ on the keyboard. Much greater emphasis therefore is generally placed by string teachers on students ‘using their ears’ when playing. However pianists equally must learn to listen – to both the pitch (despite the fact that they cannot alter it) and the quality of sound they are producing. Good reading skills should also be cultivated from the early lessons. It is, of course, a fine balance encouraging students to read music and, at the same time, develop a good ear and play from memory; it is essential for musical literacy however that reading skills are encouraged because in a sense they unlock one ‘key’ to the development of musical literacy.

An area identified by 25 (42.4%) of teachers was the development of good musical concepts. At a basic level this includes attention to dynamics, phrasing, articulation correct observance of rests, balance of hands and so on; later on it includes, amongst others, pedalling, interpretation and an understanding of stylistic differences. Finally, 2 teachers suggested

‘other’ basic foundations: developing the ‘right’ attitude to piano learning, and exposure to different types of music.

Q. 8 Common problems

A. Fingers are not properly curved	50	84.7%
B. Difficulty sustaining an even tempo	36	61.0%
C. Bad posture	31	52.5%
D. Rests not observed	26	44.1%
E. Not keeping eyes on music	29	49.2%
F. Playing too fast	13	22.0%
G. Dependent on letter names, or marked fingerings	23	39.0%
H. Other	5	8.5%
Total	213	



The overwhelming problem as identified by 50 teachers (84.7%) was students’ failure to curve their fingers correctly. This is a habit that can become increasingly difficult to rectify if not addressed early on. Next, as indicated by 36 teachers (61.0%) was a difficulty in sustaining an even tempo. There are numerous ways of addressing this, including requiring students to clap the rhythm (including doing this when the piece is played by the teacher), or, especially with very young children, even ‘marching’ to the rhythm. Students must learn to internalize the beat as soon as possible.

Approximately half of the teachers (31 or 52.5%) drew attention to bad posture as being a common problem. Again, this is something that must be addressed from the very

beginning; the issue of musician's 'injuries' has received increased attention in recent years and good posture is one of the key factors in preventing such injuries.

The problem of students keeping their eyes on the music was highlighted by 29 teachers (49.2%). It is difficult for students to read the score whilst, at the same time, develop a sense of keyboard that does not require them to be constantly looking at the keyboard; an overemphasis on looking at the keys can cause many reading problems. This takes time and confidence and should be approached slowly; nonetheless, the learning of this skill should not be neglected even in the early stages.

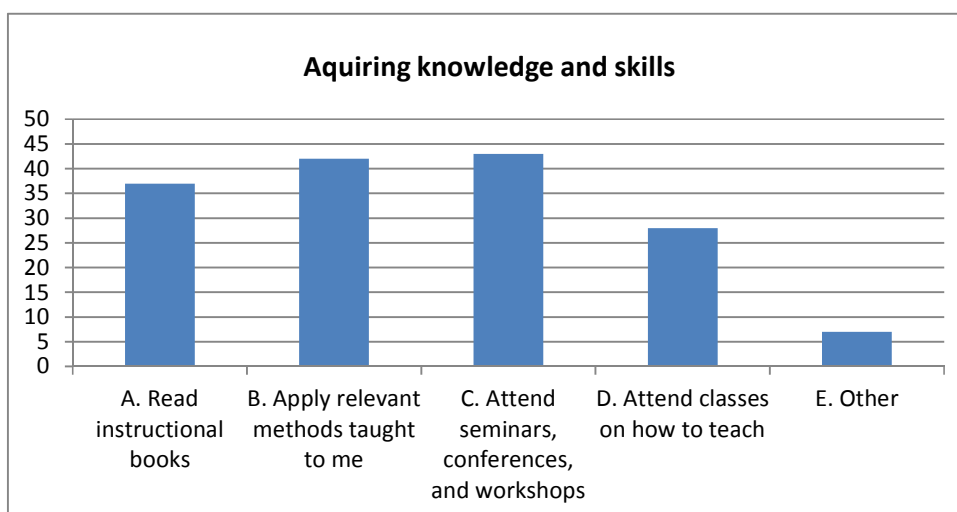
Observance of rests was seen as a problem by 26 teachers (44.1%). It is important that students understand from the outset that a beat of silence is of equal duration to a beat of sound. (Later on, some students experience problems sustaining the fermata – an elongation of the beat).

Another common problem, indicated by 23 teachers (39.0%), was that of students being dependent on letter names written above the notes, or a tendency 'to play by numbers' (that is, to 'play' the fingering indications). Ultimately, a reliance on numbers does not work, requiring the student to return to basics and learn staff notation; at this stage it can become particularly frustrating (for the teacher as well as the student). On playing too fast, 13 (22%) teachers said their students like to play fast.

Finally, under 'Other', 5 teachers (8.5%) listed as common problems keyboard geography, inadequate practice, young children not being able to sit for long, a short concentration span, and weak fingers.

Q. 9 Acquiring knowledge and skills for teaching beginner and elementary piano students

A. Read instructional books	37	62.7%
B. Apply relevant methods taught to me	42	71.2%
C. Attend seminars, conferences, and workshops	43	72.9%
D. Attend classes on how to teach	28	47.5%
E. Other	7	11.9%
Total	157	



The major source for piano teachers' professional development with respect to the teaching of beginners and elementary students was (as indicated by 43 teachers or 72.9%) attendance at seminars, conferences and workshops. Within the Malaysian context, this almost invariably would mean attending seminars conducted by the ABRSM, London College of Music, and Trinity Guildhall. These seminars are conducted annually and, understandably, focus specifically on the examination syllabi. Whilst often useful – and can cater for both experienced and inexperienced teachers – they are less 'broad' than seminars or conferences that bring together a wider spectrum of philosophies and approaches to piano teaching and learning.

A similar number of teachers (42 or 71.2%) indicated that their teaching was, to some extent, a reflection of what they had been taught. In practice, they learnt from – and to some extent at least, taught like – their own piano teachers.

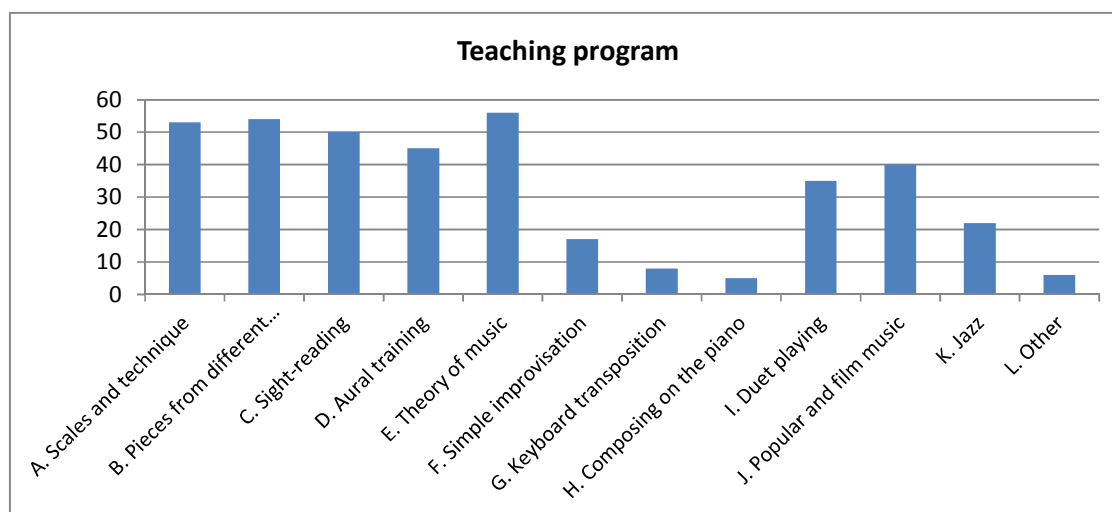
Reading instructional books as a means of acquiring appropriate knowledge and skills was indicated by 37 teachers (62.7%). Bookshops do stock some material on piano teaching. Further, in recent years, an increasing number of books related to piano teaching has become available, with many of them emanating from the United States of America; at the same time, some material is published by the UK music examination bodies. Sadly, libraries are generally inadequate in this respect. Happily, the Internet is becoming a popular source for learning about and acquiring new publications.

Some teachers (28 or 47.5%) indicated attending classes on how to teach. Often these classes are conducted by piano teachers (or music schools) as part of a student's preparation for a teaching diploma from one of the music examination bodies. Under 'Other' sources, 7

teachers (11.9%) indicated, between them, attending Master classes, contacting more experienced teachers for guidance, researching approaches on-line, and devising personal, creative approaches to teaching.

Q. 10 Teaching program

A. Scales and technique	53	89.8%
B. Pieces from different periods	54	91.5%
C. Sight-reading	50	84.7%
D. Aural training	45	76.3%
E. Theory of music	56	94.9%
F. Simple improvisation	17	28.8%
G. Keyboard transposition	8	13.6%
H. Composing on the piano	5	8.5%
I. Duet playing	35	59.3%
J. Popular and film music	40	67.8%
K. Jazz	22	37.3%
Other	6	10.2%
Total	391	



Theory of music was considered essential in their teaching program for beginner and elementary students by all but 3 of the teachers (56 or 94.9%). Almost as many teachers (54 or 91.5%) taught students pieces from different periods. To some extent this might be seen as reflecting the examination syllabi, which require students to learn works from different periods.

A very large majority of teachers (53 or 89.8%) also believed in the teaching of technique. It is almost axiomatic that a good technique is essential to the learning of any instrument. Sight-reading was espoused by 50 (or 84.7%) of teachers. This is sometimes a neglected skill. It is perhaps listed highly here because it is a component of examination syllabi – and most of the teachers who participated in this survey would have presented students for examinations. But having said this, it does not account for the fact that only three-quarters of the teachers (45 or 76.3%) provided aural training to students – yet this too is included in examination syllabi. One possible reason for the discrepancy between these two areas is that by its very nature, learning a new piece entails sight-reading skills. Regardless, it is to be regretted that almost a quarter of respondents neglected this important aspect of piano teaching.

Popular and film music was included in the teaching of 40 teachers (67.8%). Those who taught jazz, on the other hand, numbered only 22 (37.3%). As with other areas, this is undoubtedly a reflection of examination syllabi in general. It must be acknowledged however that had this survey been undertaken 20 or 30 years ago the corresponding figures for these genres would most likely have been lower; it is only in recent years that these genres have found their way into syllabi.

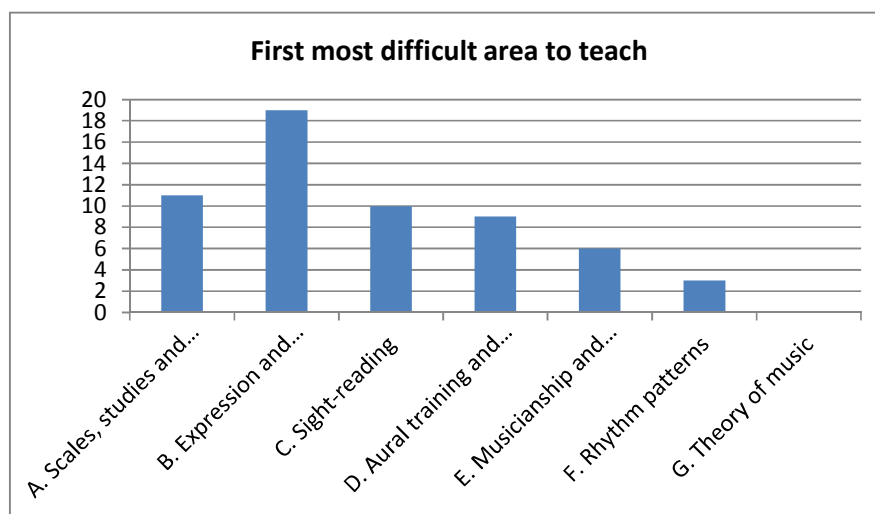
More than half of the teachers (35 or 59.3%) indicated that they incorporate duet playing into their teaching; this might be playing with the teacher or another student. In addition to being valuable for sight-reading, duet playing can be an excellent introduction to ensemble work for students, including accompanying. (One teacher did, under ‘Other’ specifically mention including this in her teaching.) More than a quarter of the respondents (17 or 28.8%) incorporate simple improvisation into their teaching. This, like duet playing, also has great benefits, not least of which is training a student’s ear to use simple chords and provide an accompaniment to a melodic line. Unlike duet playing, improvisation has not traditionally been included in piano lessons; that it is part of the teaching program for some teachers is encouraging. Only 5 teachers (8.5%) indicated that they encouraged students to compose at the piano; although improvisation is also composing at the piano, the term ‘composing at the piano’ is normally regarded by teachers in Malaysia as a more ‘formal’ approach to composition. A somewhat related skill is keyboard transposition; far fewer teachers however used this: 8 or 13.6%. In ‘Other’ 6 (10.2%) teachers suggested: finger exercise, playing by ear, sight-singing, accompaniment, giving some easy pieces, and some songs of their choice. In addition to training the ear, transposition is an almost indispensable skill for accompanists.

It must be stressed that the above responses, whilst giving an overview of the ‘components’ of a piano lesson, do not provide a picture of the quality of teaching with respect to any of them; this, conceivably, could be the subject of further research.

Q. 11 The three most difficult teaching areas in a music program

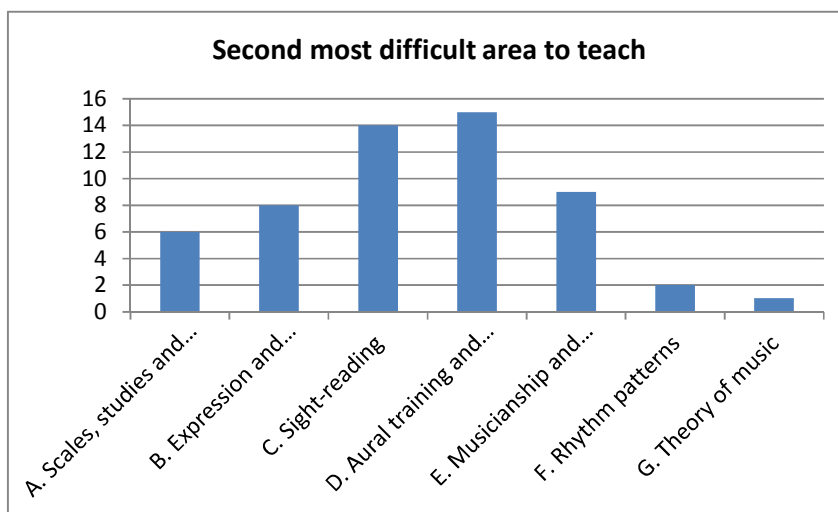
The most difficult area to teach

A. Scales, studies and technique	11	19.0%
B. Expression and interpretation	19	32.8%
C. Sight-reading	10	17.2%
D. Aural training and listening skills	9	15.5%
E. Musicianship and keyboard skills	6	10.3%
F. Rhythm patterns	3	5.2%
G. Theory of music	0	0.0%
Other	0	0.0%
Total	58	



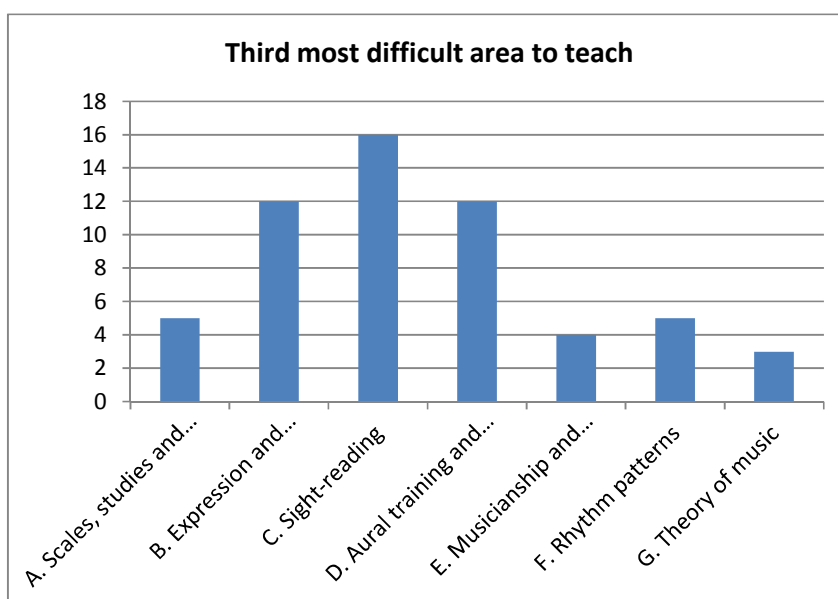
The second most difficult area to teach

A. Scales, studies and technique	7	12.1%
B. Expression and interpretation	7	12.1%
C. Sight-reading	16	27.6%
D. Aural training and listening skills	15	25.9%
E. Musicianship and keyboard skills	9	15.5%
F. Rhythm patterns	2	3.4%
G. Theory of music	2	3.4%
Total	58	



The third most difficult area to teach

A. Scales, studies and technique	5	8.6%
B. Expression and interpretation	13	22.4%
C. Sight-reading	15	25.9%
D. Aural training and listening skills	9	15.5%
E. Musicianship and keyboard skills	6	10.3%
F. Rhythm patterns	6	10.3%
G. Theory of music	3	5.2%
H. Other	1	1.7%
Total	58	



‘Expression and interpretation’ was regarded as the most difficult area to teach by almost a third of the teachers (19 or 32.8%). A further 7 (12.1%) thought it was the second most difficult area to teach, with 13 (22.4%) putting it third. That is, slightly over two-thirds of the teachers (39 or 67.2%) found this area difficult. It is not surprising!

‘Scales, studies and technique’ was considered most difficult to teach by 11 (19%) of the teachers. A further 7 teachers (12.1%) believed it to be the second most difficult area to teach, and 5 (8.6%) listed it as third in difficulty. That is, a little more than a third (23 teachers or 39.7%) thought that this was a difficult area to teach.

Sight-reading was the next area that teachers found most difficult to teach (10 or 17.2%). A further 16 (27.6%) listed it second in difficulty, and 15 or 25.9% listed it third. That is, 41 teachers (70.7%) included sight-reading in their top three areas that are difficult to teach.

‘Aural training and listening skills’ were identified by 9 (15.5%) of the teachers as being the most difficult to teach. This area was identified as the second most difficult area by 15 teachers (25.9%) and a further 9 (15.5%) listed it third. That is, 33 teachers (56.9%) put aural training and listening skills in the top three areas of difficulty.

Identified by relatively few teachers (6 or 10.3%) as the most difficult area to teach was ‘musicianship and keyboard skills’. A further 9 (15.5%) put it second, and 6 (10.3%) listed it third. In total, 21 teachers (36.1%) have this in their top three areas of difficulty.

Even fewer (3 or 5.2%) found rhythm patterns the most difficult area to teach. A further 2 teachers (3.4%) placed it second in difficulty, and 6 (10.3%) third. That is, 11 teachers (18.9%) have rhythm patterns in their top three areas.

None of the teachers listed ‘theory of music’ as being the most difficult area to teach. However, 2 teachers (3.4%) listed it second, and 3 (5.2%) third. In all, only 5 teachers (8.6%) had it in their top three category.

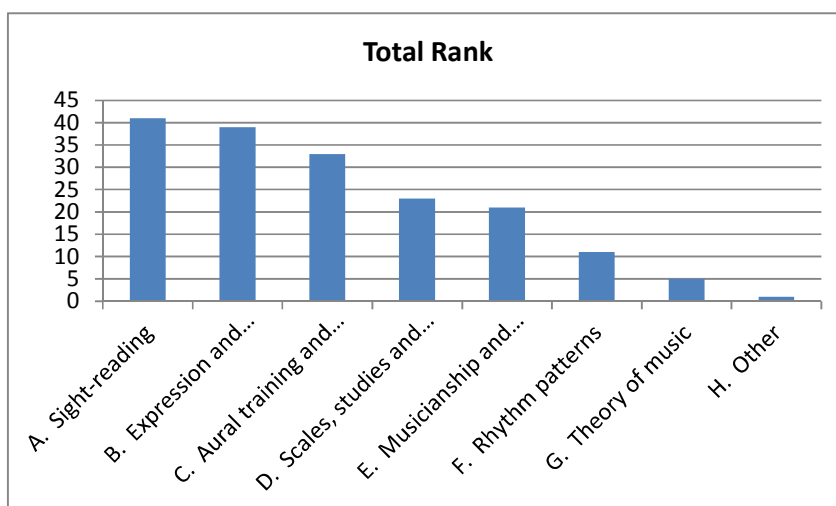
Only one teacher added a further area (under the third most difficult category): memory. Certainly, the cultivation of musical memory is extremely important. Concert pianists tend to agree that the weakest or most unreliable form of memory is kinaesthetic (or motor) memory. For secure memory work students need to develop aural and analytic memory.

In summary, taking teachers’ three rankings as a whole, the three areas considered most difficult to teach were ‘sight reading’ (41 teachers or 70.7%), followed very closely by ‘expression and interpretation’ (39 or 67.3%), then ‘aural training and listening skills’ (33 or 56.9%). Further down was ‘scales, studies and technique’ (23 or 39.7%), which was slightly

above ‘musicianship and keyboard skills’ (21 or 36.1%). Least support was given to ‘rhythm patterns’ (11 or 18.9%) and ‘theory of music’ (5 or 8.6%) (see below).

Total Ranking

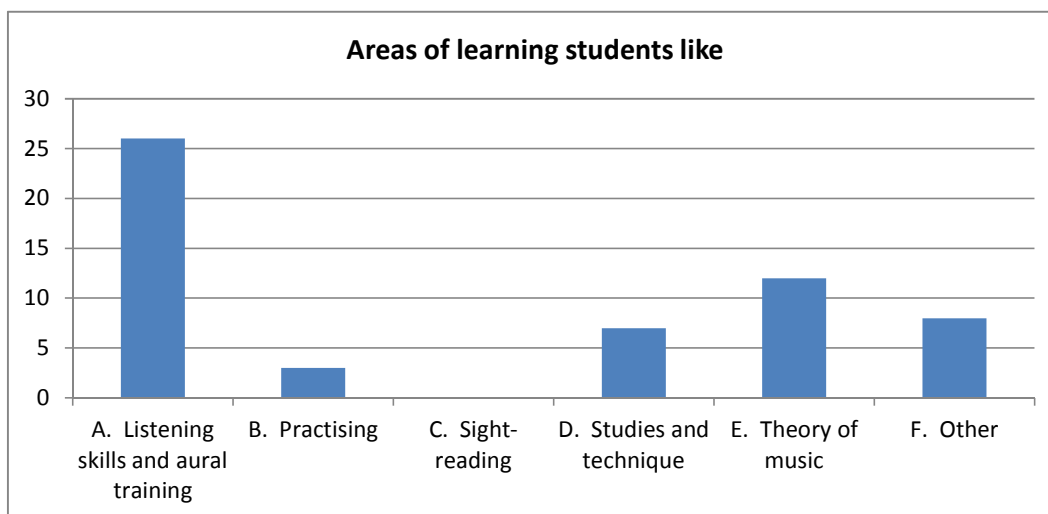
A. Sight-reading	41	70.7%
B. Expression and interpretation	39	67.3%
C. Aural training and listening skills	33	56.9%
D. Scales, studies and technique	23	39.7%
E. Musicianship and keyboard skills	21	36.1%
F. Rhythm patterns	11	18.9%
G. Theory of music	5	8.6%
H. Other	1	1.7%
Total	174	



Q. 12 Area of piano learning that students most like/dislike

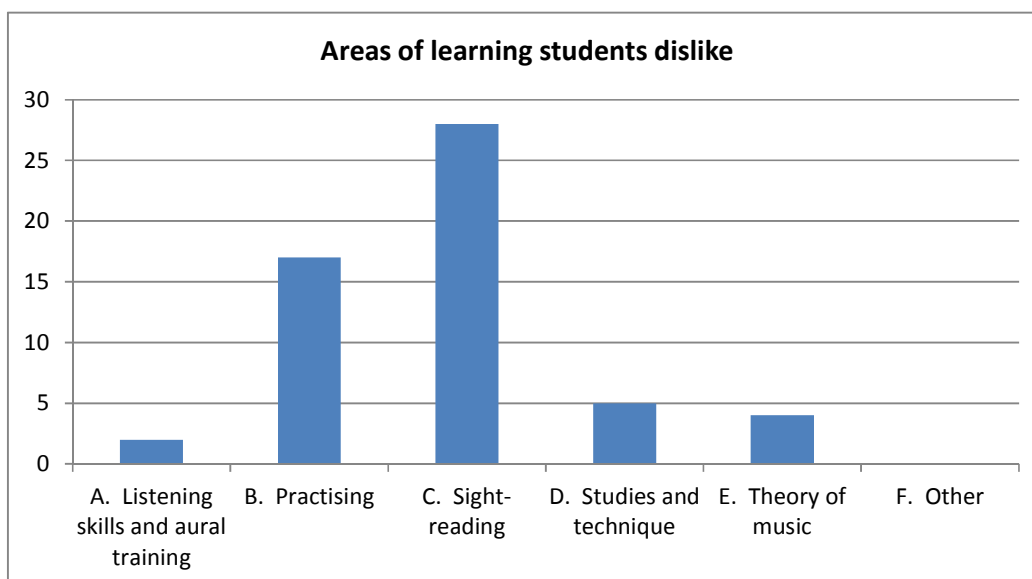
Areas of piano learning most liked

A. Listening skills and aural training	26	46.4%
B. Practising	3	5.4%
C. Sight-reading	0	0.0%
D. Studies and technique	7	12.5%
E. Theory of music	12	21.4%
F. Other	8	14.2%
Total	56	



Areas of piano learning most disliked

A. Listening skills and aural training	2	3.6%
B. Practising	17	30.4%
C. Sight-reading	28	50.0%
D. Studies and technique	5	8.9%
E. Theory of music	4	7.1%
F. Other	0	0.0%
Total	56	



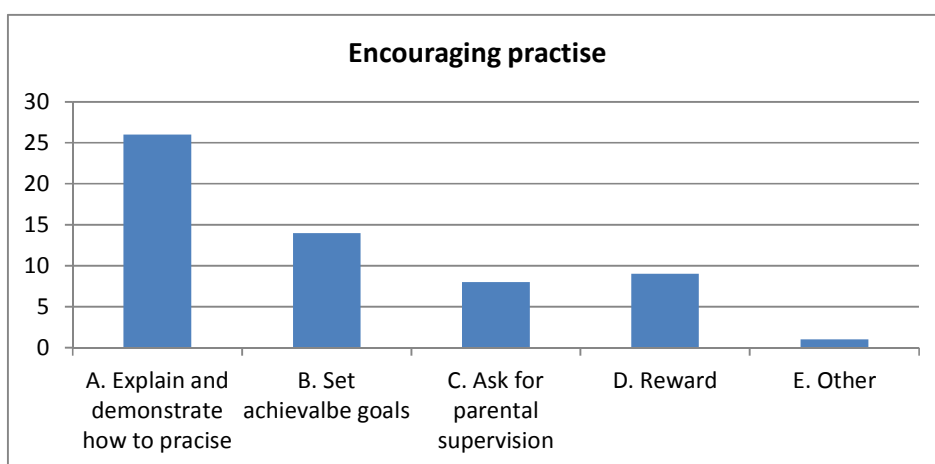
Three teachers did not answer this question. Of the remaining 56, nearly half of them (26 or 46.4%) indicated that the activity that their students most liked was 'listening skills and

aural training'. Next in popularity was 'theory of music' (12 teachers or 21.4%). Following this was 'Other', which was indicated by 8 teachers (14.2%). They provided statements such as 'playing pieces they like', 'playing popular songs', 'playing pieces with a jazz flavour', and playing 'music games'. 'Studies and technique' followed next (7 teachers or 12.5%) and 'practising' (3 or 5.4%). No teachers indicated that their students most liked sight-reading.

It is not surprising, therefore, that 28 teachers (50.0%) suggested that sight-reading was the area that their students most disliked. It will not be a surprise to any piano teacher that almost a third (17 or 30.4%) of teachers responded that their students did not like practising; indeed, it might be surprising to some that this figure was not higher. Much lower down, 5 teachers (8.9%) suggested that their students did not like activities concerned with 'studies and technique'; 4 (7.1%) identified 'theory of music'; and 2 (3.6%) proffered 'listening skills and aural training'.

Q. 13 Advice for encouraging practice

A. Explain and demonstrate how to practise	26	44.8%
B. Set achievable goals	14	24.1%
C. Ask for parental supervision	8	13.8%
D. Reward	9	15.5%
E. Other	1	1.7%
Total	58	



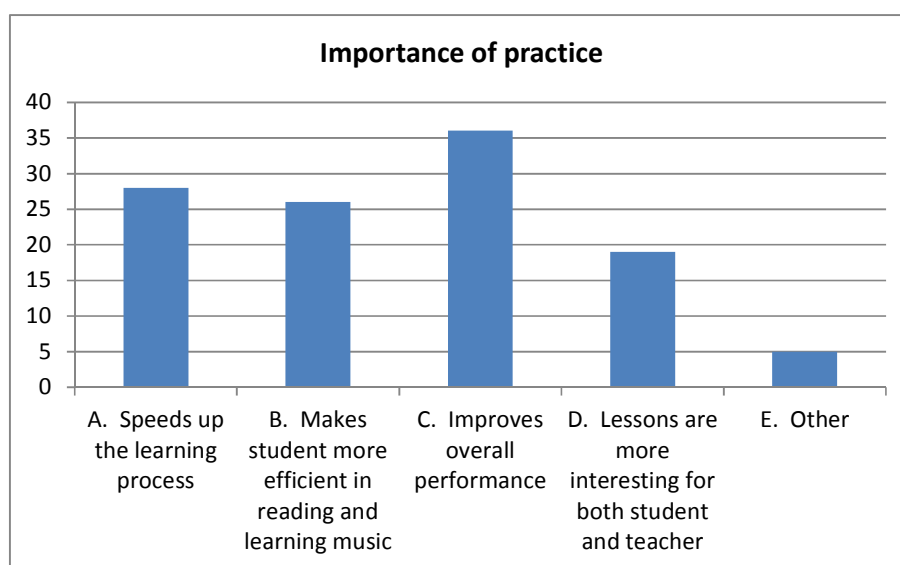
By far the most common means of encouraging students to practise was by explanation and demonstration (26 teachers or 44.8%). This was followed by the setting of achievable goals (14 or 24.1%). Some teachers (9 or 15.5%) used rewards, and 8 (13.8%) enlisted

parental support in assisting with children’s practice. One teacher indicated ‘Other’: “verbal affirmation”; this might be seen as a form of reward. It is a *sine qua non* that anyone wishing to learn the piano (or any other instrument) must practise regularly – and effectively.

Ascertaining the quality of a student’s practise could be the subject of future research. To a large extent it could be argued that a prime consideration is student ‘motivation’.

Q. 14 The importance of practice

A. Speeds up the learning process	28	47.5%
B. Makes student more efficient in reading and learning music	26	44.1%
C. Improves overall performance	36	61.0%
D. Lessons are more interesting for both student and teacher	19	32.2%
E. Other	5	8.5%
Total	114	



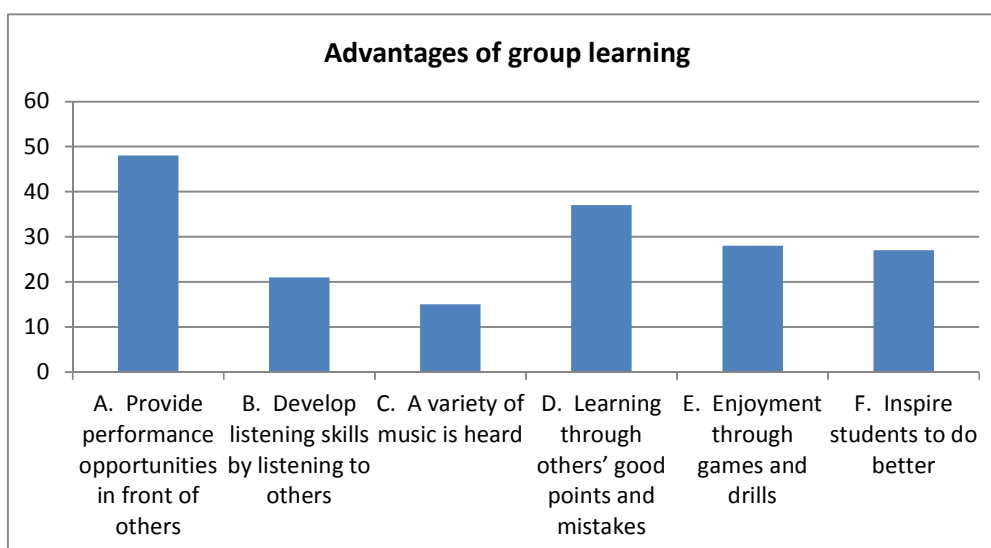
Slightly less than two-thirds of the teachers (36 or 61%) believed that practice improves overall performance; it would be difficult to argue against this! Indeed, it would be difficult to dispute any of the suggestions given in the questionnaire: what, perhaps, is surprising, is that there was not an even more positive response rate to each of the suggestions. That practice ‘speeds-up the learning process’, was confirmed by 28 teachers (47.5%); 26 (44.1%) believed that it contributes to student efficiency in reading and learning music; and 19 (32.2%) were of the opinion that good practice is conducive to lessons being more interesting for both the student and the teacher. Some teachers (5 or 8.5%) volunteered further

suggestions: ‘develops self-discipline in learning’, ‘helps a student to become an independent learner’, ‘leads to a sense of achievement’, ‘enables students to learn a greater repertoire’, and ‘practice makes perfect’.

Q. 15 Advantages/disadvantages of group learning

Advantages of group learning

A. Provide performance opportunities in front of others	48	81.4%
B. Develop listening skills by listening to others	21	35.6%
C. A variety of music is heard	15	25.4%
D. Learning through others’ good points and mistakes	37	62.7%
E. Enjoyment through games and drills	28	47.5%
F. Inspire students to do better	27	45.8%
Total	176	

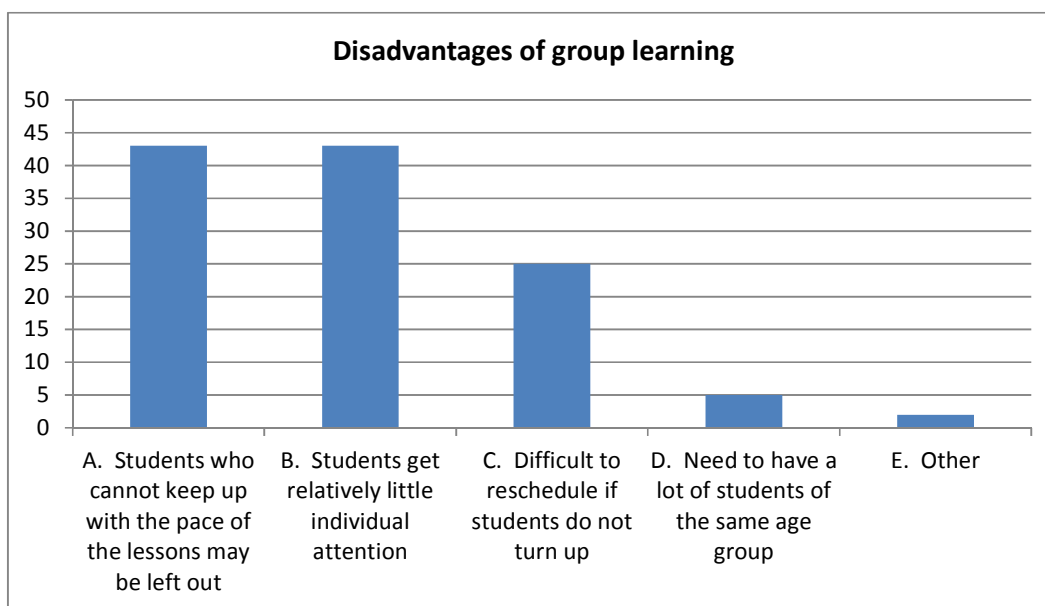


Teachers were asked to indicate three advantages of group learning. Piano students often lack performance opportunities and it is probably for this reason that 48 teachers (81.4%) support group lessons: they ‘provide performance opportunities in front of others’. The benefits of performing in front of others at an early age should not be underestimated and include development of confidence in performance, assisting in memory development, and giving students a goal to aim for and practice towards. Group lessons provide an effective teaching-learning function in that students can learn by hearing both the good and bad aspects (or mistakes) of other students’ playing, and this was attested by 37 teachers (62.7%). Almost

half of the teachers (28 or 47.5%) acknowledged that benefits of students in a group engaging in games and drills. A similar number (27 or 45.8%) saw that group learning can act as a motivator in inspiring students to do better. Just over a third (21 or 35.6%) recognised that listening to others assists children in developing their listening skills. A quarter (15 or 25.4%) indicated that group lessons, where children play different pieces, can acquaint students with a wider repertoire. Group lessons are more traditionally associated with string, wind, brass or percussion instruments: however they can also have advantages for those learning the piano. Unlike these other instruments however, it is almost impossible for all students to play the piano at the same time (unless, of course, they are playing duets).

Disadvantages of group learning

A. Students who cannot keep up with the pace of the lessons may be left out	43	72.9%
B. Students get relatively little individual attention	43	72.9%
C. Difficult to reschedule if students do not turn up	25	42.4%
D. Need to have a lot of students of the same age group	5	8.5%
E. Other	2	3.4%
Total	118	

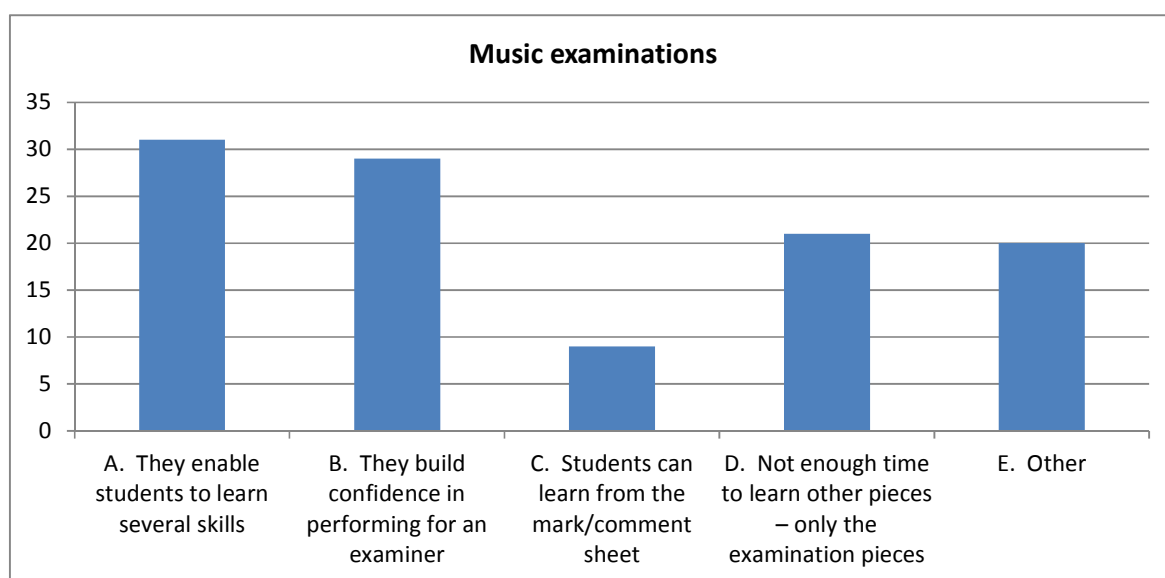


Teachers were asked to indicate two disadvantages of group learning. Almost three-quarters of them (43 or 72.9%) recognised that ‘some students might not be able to keep up with the pace of the lesson’ and that, in a group lesson, ‘students get relatively little individual

attention’. A problem acknowledged by 25 (42.4%) is the ‘difficulty of making-up a lesson if the student misses’. Considered to be of minor importance (by only 5 teachers or 8.5%) was having enough students of the same age group to make a group lesson feasible. In other two teachers indicated but did not give answers. All of these are important considerations to take into account when considering group lessons.

Q. 16 Music examinations

A. They enable students to learn several skills	31	52.5%
B. They build confidence in performing for an examiner	29	49.2%
C. Students can learn from the mark/comment sheet	9	15.3%
D. Not enough time to learn other pieces – only the examination pieces	21	35.6%
E. Other	20	33.9%
Total	110	

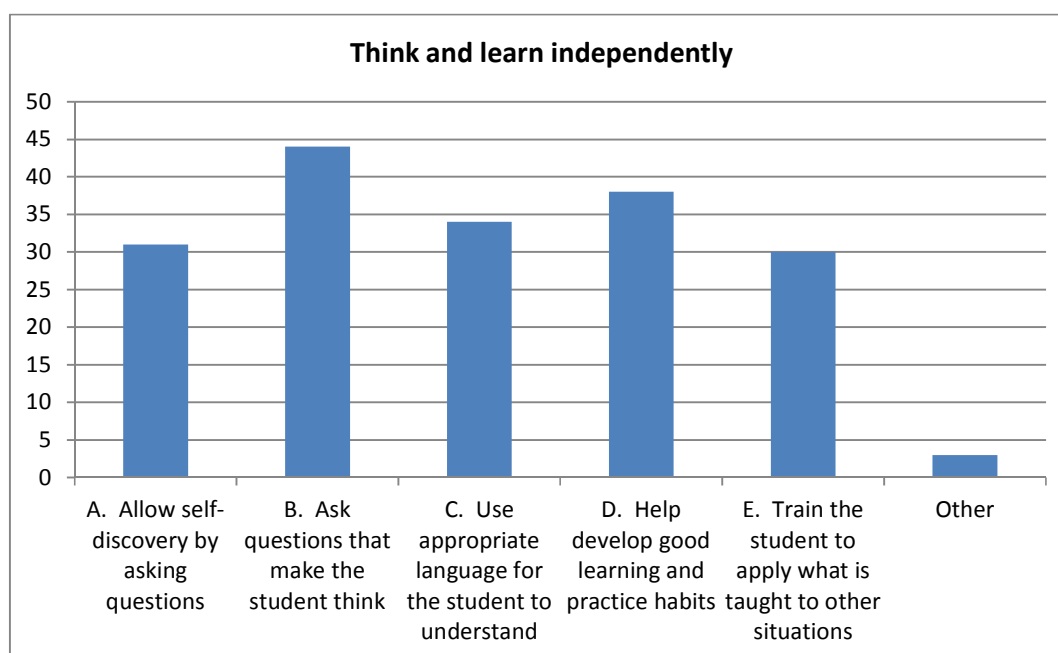


Just over half of the teachers (31 or 52.5%) indicated that examinations encourage the learning of several skills. Almost as many (29 or 49.2%) believed that they build confidence in performing for an examiner; ideally this confidence extends to performing for others as well. Approximately a third (21 or 35.6%) were of the opinion that because of the preparation time needed for the examination, there was not enough time to learn other pieces. Of least benefit according to these teachers was students learning from the mark/comment sheet (9, or 15.3%). It is possible that some teachers do not use this feedback sufficiently well; or perhaps,

although using it to assist their own teaching, do not analyse it with students. Another possibility is that some teachers do not use the mark/comment sheet as a diagnostic tool at all. A third (20 or 33.9%) gave additional opinions that can be summarised as follows: examinations can act as a motivator for ongoing learning, they give students a goal to practise towards and a sense of achievement, they provide one avenue for the development of performance skills, they can bring out performance skills that had been untapped, they provide feedback on how well a students is progressing. One teacher wrote that she does not encourage examinations unless it is a desire of the student or parents. On the negative side, it was mentioned that some students dislike practising exam pieces and prefer to play other pieces. Perhaps what needs to be stressed is that learning the piano should be more than sitting for music examinations; however, if handled appropriately there can be benefits for students and teachers.

Q. 17 Encouraging students to think and learn independently

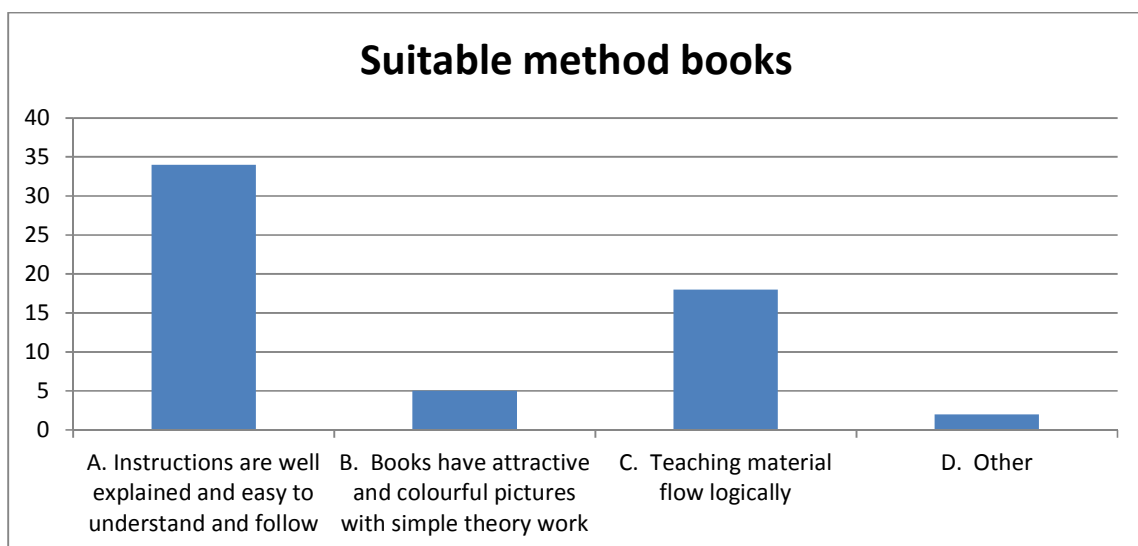
A. Allow self-discovery by asking questions	31	52.5%
B. Ask questions that make the student think	44	74.6%
C. Use appropriate language for the student to understand	34	57.6%
D. Help develop good learning and practice habits	38	64.4%
E. Train the student to apply what is taught to other situations	30	50.8%
Other	3	5.1%
Total	180	



Three-quarters of the teachers (44 or 74.6%) recognised the need to ask students questions that cause them to think. Thinking of course can include such skills as reflection, making comparisons, observing contrasts, and so on: all of these can contribute to the development of independence in learning. Almost two-thirds (38 or 64.4%) indicated that helping students to develop good learning and practice habits is important for the development of independent learning. Over half (34 or 57.6%) acknowledged the importance of using appropriate language to develop thinking skills that lead to independent learning. Approximately half (31 or 52.5%) recognised the importance of asking questions to develop self-discovery; appropriate questioning, of course, has long been recognised as an excellent way of developing the type of thinking skills that can lead to independent learning. Half (30 or 50.8%) recognised the need to train students to apply what is taught to other situations. This might be as basic as early learning of dynamic contrasts or the playing of simple rhythms; at a more advanced level it might include applying the same technique for using arm weight in chord production in a new piece as had been learnt in a previous piece. Of the 3 teachers (5.1%) who offered other suggestions, one mentioned the importance of students attending concerts and observing and reflecting upon performances; another stressed the importance of giving students opportunities to make their own decisions, as distinct from playing exactly as the teacher dictates; and the third highlighted the importance of careful and self-criticism. These are all excellent suggestions.

Q. 18 Choosing a suitable method book

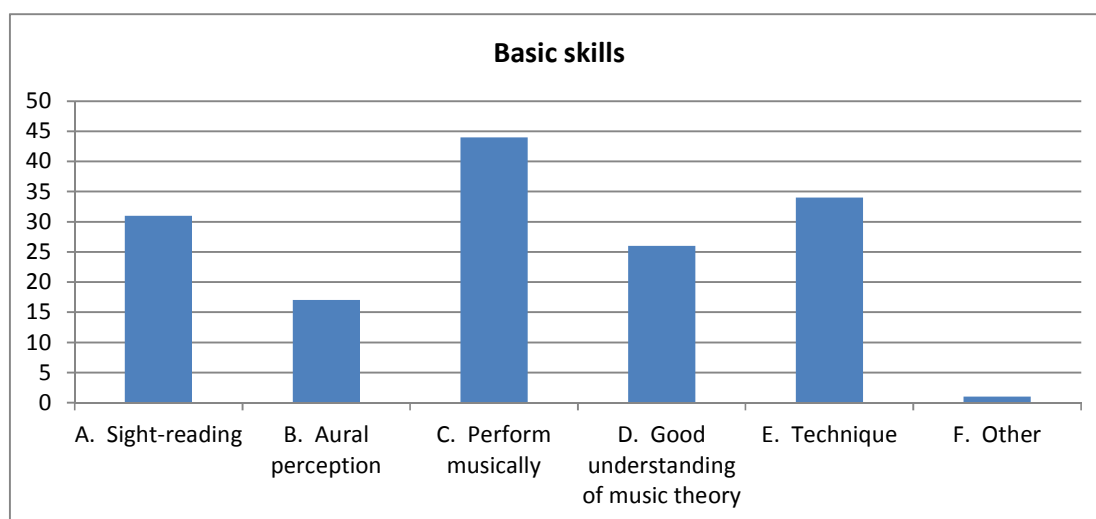
A. Instructions are well explained and easy to understand and follow	34	57.6%
B. Books have attractive and colourful pictures with simple theory work	5	8.5%
C. Teaching material flow logically	18	30.5%
D. Other	2	3.4%
Total	59	



In choosing a suitable method book the highest number of teachers (34 or 57.6%) were of the opinion that it should be one where the instructions are well explained and easy to understand. A further 18 teachers (30.5%) chose, as their major consideration, a book in which the teaching material flows logically. For a few (5 or 8.5%), the most important consideration were books that have attractive and colourful pictures with simple theory work; it is quite likely that these teachers were thinking specifically of young beginners. It needs to be noted that in this question teachers were only given the option of making one choice: it is quite conceivable that they considered all three of them to be important. Interestingly, 2 teachers (3.4%) offered other possibilities: one suggested that she chooses a book that easily enables her to move on to the examination syllabus; the other preferred books that were 'comprehensive' in that they covered most areas of piano learning: playing, listening, sight-singing, sight-reading, and theory.

Q. 19 Basic skills

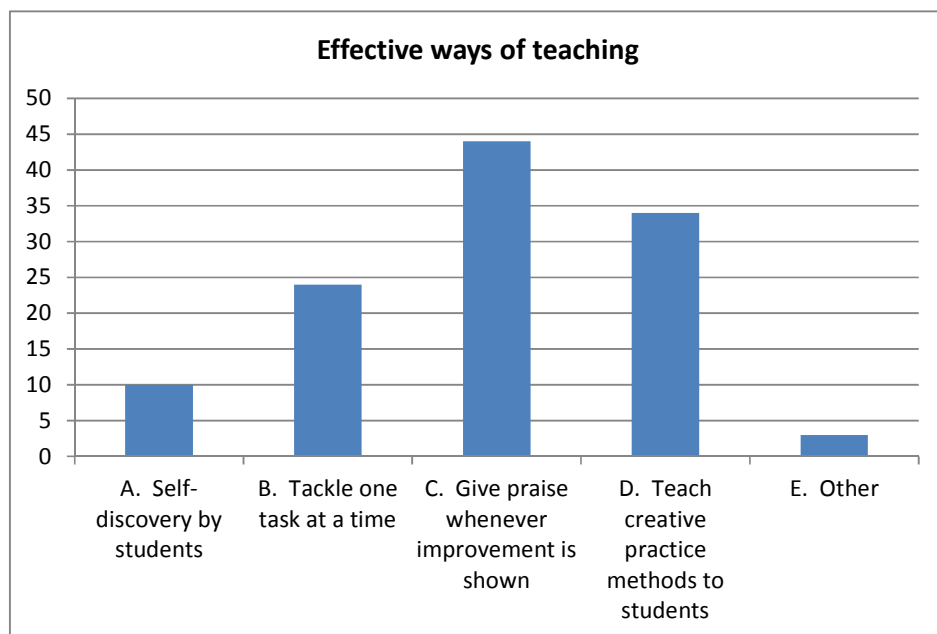
A. Sight-reading	31	52.5%
B. Aural perception	17	28.8%
C. Perform musically	44	74.6%
D. Good understanding of music theory	26	44.1%
E. Technique	34	57.6%
F. Other	1	1.7%
Total	153	



In identifying the skills they considered important for beginner and elementary students to be efficient in as a basis for satisfaction and enjoyment of music-making, three-quarters of the teachers (44 or 74.6%) emphasised an ability to perform musically. More than half (34 or 57.6%) identified technique and slightly fewer, but still over half (31 or 52.5%), identified sight-reading. Theory of music was indicated by 26 teachers (44.1%). Aural perception was considered important by only 17 teachers (28.8%). One teacher added that she wanted her students to show initiative and seek out music for themselves to play. In looking at these results it must be kept in mind that teachers were not restricted to one response only. Whilst it is not surprising that the highest number chose an ability to perform musically, it is perhaps disconcerting that not all of them did so. Equally it is disconcerting that less than a third (only 17 of the 59 teachers) considered aural perception to be important. This could provide the basis for further investigation and research. (In the accompanying guidebook for piano teachers, it will be seen that developing aural perception is stressed.)

Q. 20 Effective ways of teaching

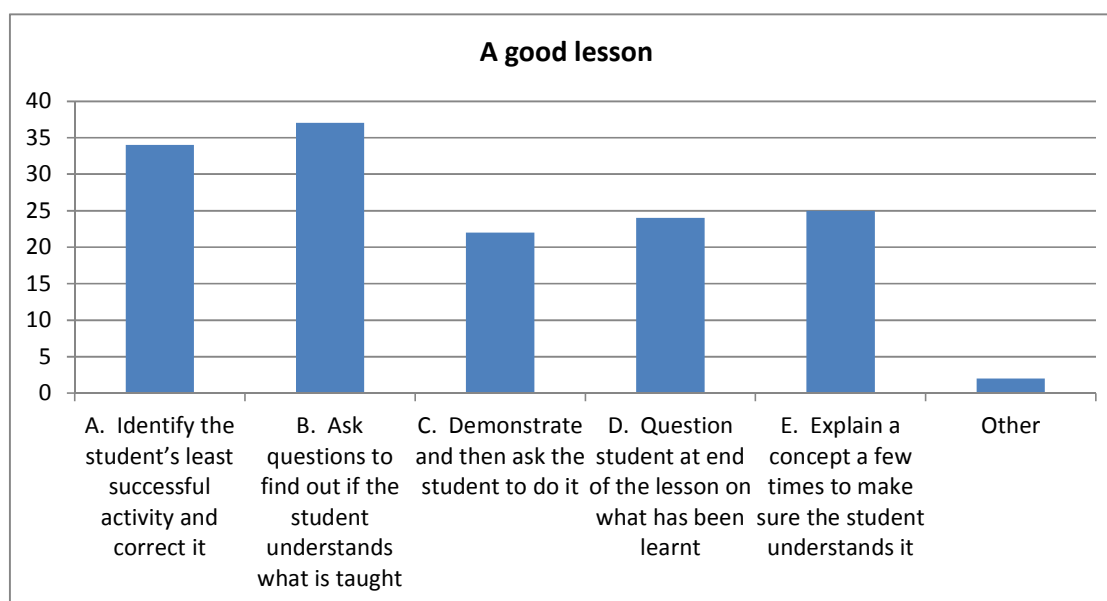
A. Self-discovery by students	10	16.9%
B. Tackle one task at a time	24	40.7%
C. Give praise whenever improvement is shown	44	74.6%
D. Teach creative practice methods to students	34	57.6%
E. Other	3	5.1%
Total	115	



Praise, which can act as a reward and a motivator, is vital in teaching in general. It might thus have been expected that a high percentage of piano teachers would use it. Three-quarters of the respondents (44 or 74.6%) indicated that they did so, believing it to be one of the most effective ways of teaching. The next area identified as important (by 34 teachers or 57.6%) was teaching creative practice methods to students. Following this was only tackling one task at a time (24 teachers or 40.7%). Self-discovery was supported by 10 of the respondents (16.9%). Other suggestions for effective ways of teaching, made by 3 teachers respectively, were to let students play pieces that they are particularly interested in, such as popular songs; teach by demonstration; and a psychological perspective: the teacher having a good relationship with students and an understanding of them.

Q. 21 Aspects of a good lesson

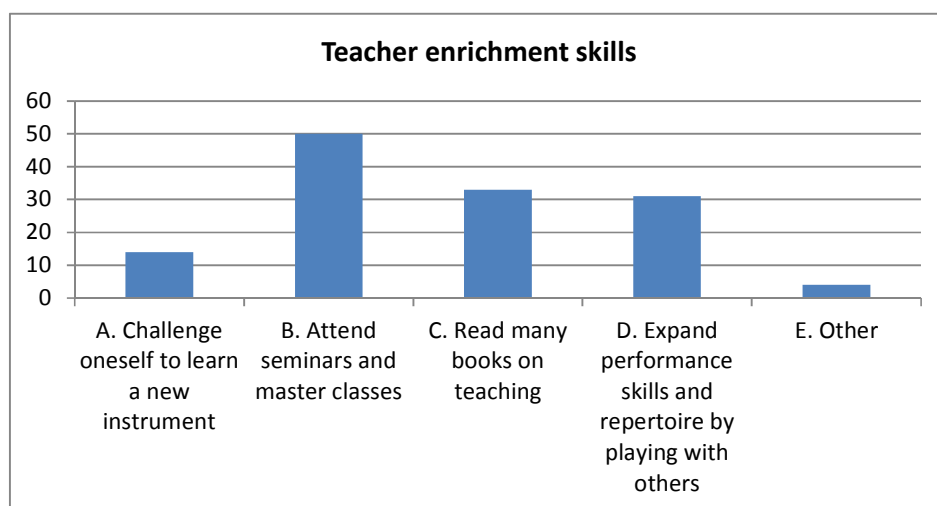
A. Identify the student's least successful activity and correct it	34	57.6%
B. Ask questions to find out if the student understands what is taught	37	62.7%
C. Demonstrate and then ask the student to do it	22	37.3%
D. Question student at end of the lesson on what has been learnt	24	40.7%
E. Explain a concept a few times to make sure the student understands it	25	42.4%
F. Other	2	3.4%
Total	144	



The aspect of a good lesson that received the most responses (37 teachers or 62.7%) was the teacher asking questions to find out if the student understands what is taught. This was followed (34 teachers or 57.6%) by identifying and correcting a student's least successful activity (or weakest point). Next was the importance of explaining things more than once to ensure that students understand concepts (25 teachers or 42.4%); followed by questioning a student at the end of the lesson to ascertain what has been learnt (24 or 40.7%); and the teacher demonstrating something and then requiring the student to do it (22 or 37.3%). Two teachers made other suggestions: in a good lesson a students should learn something new; and in a good lesson a student does not get bored. It might be that this checklist or one similar could provide the basis for a research study into actual teaching by piano teachers; this would, of course, require teachers to be observed.

Q. 22 Teacher enrichment skills

A. Challenge oneself to learn a new instrument	14	23.7%
B. Attend seminars and master classes	50	84.7%
C. Read many books on teaching	33	55.9%
D. Expand performance skills and repertoire by playing with others	31	52.5%
E. Other	4	6.8%
Total	132	



Very strong support (by 50 respondents or 84.7%) was given for attending seminars and master classes as a means of teachers enriching their music skills. Over half of them (33 or 55.9%) advocated reading many books on teaching. Almost the same number (31 or 52.5%) supported the notion of teachers expanding their performance skills and repertoire by playing with others. Considerably less support was given to teachers enriching their music skills by learning a new instrument (14 respondents or 23.7%). Between them, four teachers made other useful suggestions for enriching music skills: practising regularly and expanding one's repertoire; attending concerts – especially those given by excellent musicians; becoming acquainted with a wide concert repertoire across instruments and ensemble combinations; listening extensively to CDs; learning from experienced teachers; and reading many books on music – not just on teaching. Perhaps the most important point to be made in relation to this question is that today it is recognised in education systems worldwide that teachers have a professional responsibility to engage in ongoing professional development throughout their teaching career. Whilst this is enforceable in many institutions or systems of education, there

would seem to be little or no compulsory expectations of private teachers – certainly not in Malaysia. Indeed, it would be an interesting study to investigate what legal or ‘semi-legal’ requirements are made of private piano teachers in countries world-wide.

Q. 23 Important characteristics for teachers

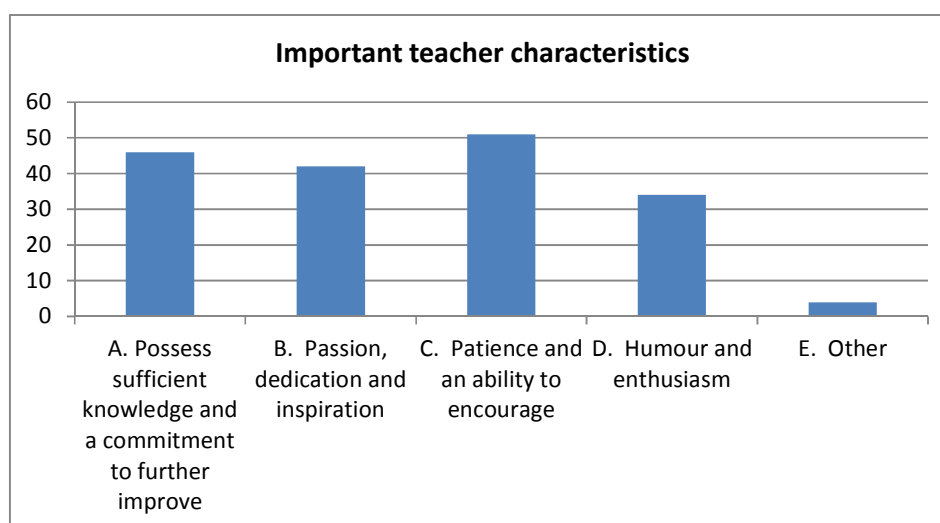
Q. 24 Appropriate personal qualities for teachers

Q. 25 Essential qualities needed to be a successful teacher

Questions 23, 24 and 25 were designed to ascertain some of the desirable characteristics or qualities evident in successful piano teachers. They are treated here collectively.

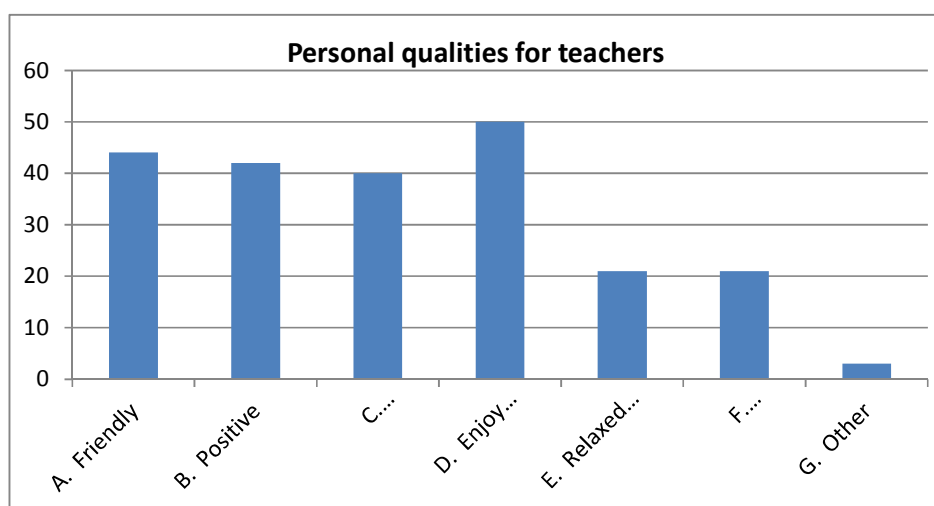
Q. 23 Important characteristics for teachers

A. Possess sufficient knowledge and a commitment to further improvement	46	78.0%
B. Passion, dedication and inspiration	42	71.2%
C. Patience and an ability to encourage	51	86.4%
D. Humour and enthusiasm	34	57.6%
E. Other	4	6.8%
Total	177	



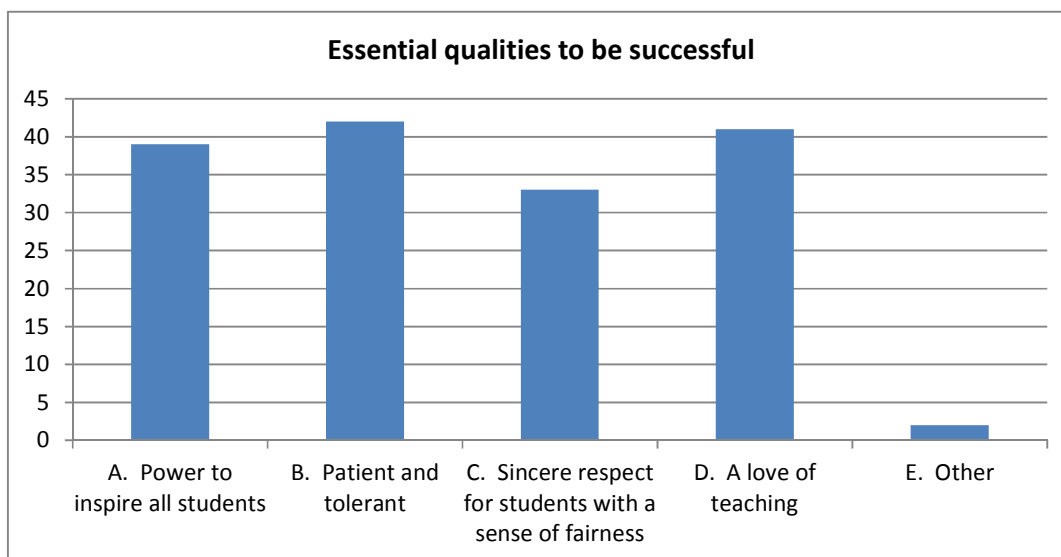
Q. 24 Appropriate personal qualities for teachers

A. Friendly	44	74.6%
B. Positive	42	71.2%
C. Imaginative and creative	40	67.8%
D. Enjoy teaching	50	84.7%
E. Relaxed manner	21	35.6%
F. Comfortable in teaching	21	35.6%
G. Other	3	5.1%
Total	221	



Q. 25 Essential qualities needed to be a successful teacher

A. Power to inspire all students	39	66.1%
B. Patient and tolerant	42	71.2%
C. Sincere respect for students with a sense of fairness	33	55.9%
D. A love of teaching	41	69.5%
E. Other	2	3.4%
Total	157	



The highest scoring item over all three questions (Questions 23-25), was the belief that a teacher should have patience and an ability to encourage (51 teachers or 86.4%). This was followed closely by a belief that teachers should enjoy teaching (50 or 84.7%). Further down was a belief that teachers should have sufficient knowledge and a commitment to further improvement (46 or 78%). This was closely followed by a belief that a teacher should be ‘friendly’ (44 or 74.6%). Next was the importance of being positive, and having passion, dedication and inspiration (both of which were identified by 42 teachers or 71.2%). In close succession was a love of teaching (41 or 69.5%); the need for a teacher to be imaginative and creative (40 or 67.8%); and an ability to inspire students (39 or 66.1%). Further down, but still identified by more than half of the respondents as being important, were the need for a teacher to evidence humour and enthusiasm (34 or 57.6%) and show sincere respect for students and a sense of fairness (33 or 55.9%). Approximately a third (21 or 35.6%) identified the somewhat related concepts of a teacher being relaxed and feeling comfortable in their role of teaching.

Some teachers identified other or additional qualities or characteristics that they see as embodying the ‘ideal’ teacher. Perhaps most important is the notion that a teacher should have a good understanding of children as well as psychology; tailoring teaching to suit students’ individual needs; the importance of teachers communicating well with both children and parents; and teachers having a sense of professional responsibility. It would be difficult to argue against the importance of any of them. Certainly, these and those specifically mentioned in the questionnaire are implicit in the accompanying book as being highly desirable.

4.2 Questions and Findings from Interviews

Ten piano teachers were interviewed using open-ended questions that corresponded to those used in the survey (see Appendix 4). The questions – organised into 10 topic areas – were given to the teachers prior to the interview. The topic areas are:

1. Teacher profile
2. Novice teachers
3. Teacher skills, knowledge and qualities
4. Teaching program
5. Sight-reading
6. Practice
7. Theory of music
8. Music examinations
9. Parental guidance
10. Advice to teachers

The interviews took approximately 45 to 60 minutes to complete. The following discussion highlights the major points and issues raised. (The discussion of the 10 broad questions – or topics – does not follow the order in which they appear in the interview script.)

Topic 1: Teacher profile

Three questions were asked in relation to this introductory topic:

- What inspired you to become a piano teacher?
- How did you start your career as a piano teacher/
- What are your aims and goals in teaching piano?

In responding to what inspired them to become a piano teacher, respondents offered a range of reasons. Four of them (Ts 1, 4, 9, 10) attributed it predominantly to coming from a family where at least one parent was a musician or piano teacher. Teacher 1, additionally, stressed that she was exposed to a lot of concerts from a young age. Teacher 5 was inspired to teach by her own piano teacher. The parents of Teacher 2 were both teachers (not of music) and she attributed her inspiration to become a teacher to this background. Teacher 6 regarded it as “a kind of natural progression”: after commencing learning the piano she decided by the age of 10 that she wanted to teach. Teacher 7 also spoke of an early love of teaching, and realizing that it can be rewarding. Teacher 3 was attracted to the possibility of being able to

impart piano playing skills to others, adding that she was also attracted to the “flexibility of hours”. Teacher 8 referred to a deep enjoyment of music and, when deciding what to study at university, chose music because she found other possible career paths “a bit boring”.

Respondents were next asked how they got started in their piano teaching career. Some mentioned that their teachers or family and friends were a source of encouragement for pursuing this career. Not surprisingly, most of them mentioned commencing with a few students and gradually building-up their teaching practice through recommendations or ‘word of mouth’. Three of them (Ts 1, 7, 8) began teaching after returning from studying music in the UK (Ts 1, 8) and the United States of America (T 7); Teacher 8 noted that prior to studying in London she had already obtained a Teachers Diploma and read quite a lot on teaching. Teacher 6 took on some private students at the same time as she was studying in London. Four respondents highlighted that they commenced teaching at a relatively early age: Teacher 2 began at the end of secondary school; at the age of 15, Teacher 4 began teaching three friends (“It gave me some pocket money”); at a young age, Teacher 9 began teaching the children of her musician father’s friends; and Teacher 10 began by observing her mother teach, subsequently assisting in the lesson, and eventually was given some students herself to teach. Teacher 3 was given students by her own piano teacher, and Teacher 5 made particular mention of being encouraged to teach by her teacher.

In discussing their aims and goals in piano teaching, the following areas were identified:

- Teaching for music enjoyment and aesthetic appreciation
- Providing a sound foundation, including a basic technical grounding

All of the respondents stressed the importance of enjoyment or aesthetic appreciation. This concept was expressed in a number of ways; for example, three teachers (Ts 3, 7, 10) related it to a feeling of ‘relaxation’ and enjoyment where the mind is free from distracting influences and focuses on the music only. Another teacher (T 5) referred to her goal of imparting and sharing her love of music to her students. Others specifically referred to the importance of introducing students to an ‘aesthetic’ dimension through music. For example, Teacher 2, referred to the learning of music being a “lifelong aesthetic experience that cannot be separated from our lives.” Teacher 6 spoke of the importance of piano students being able “to delight and enjoy themselves” through their playing; she added that students should not be limited by style or genre: the most important consideration simply being that they be introduced to “good music”. She went beyond the aesthetic dimension in discussing her goals in teaching, suggesting that “The benefits of music are enormous from a holistic perspective

and, among others, include the provision of an emotional outlet, the development of confidence, coordination, discipline and perseverance, [as well as] the development of the mind in unique ways.” Teacher 3 drew a link between appreciation and creativity in listening and performance. Two teachers (Ts 7, 8) cautioned against over-emphasizing examinations to the detriment of enjoyment and love of playing piano for its own sake.

An important aim for three teachers (Ts 1, 6, 9) was giving students a sound foundation in music that includes a strong technical grounding; they discussed it as an ‘indispensable’ aim. Teacher 6 referred to the provision not only of a technical grounding, but “a good musical” one as well. Teacher 9 drew a connection between a sound foundation in music and the development of a love of music and enjoyment in playing piano and sharing this love; she added that learning to play pieces in different styles and from different periods also leads to a valuable historic perspective in music learning, and this too was part of the development of a sound foundation.

Topic 2: Novice Teachers

Two questions were asked in relation to this topic:

- How can a novice teacher gain teaching experience before starting to instruct students?
- What advice would you give novice teachers to assist them in their teaching?

With regard to gaining experience before teaching, 8 of the 10 respondents specifically recommended that novice teachers observe experienced teachers (Ts 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). Teacher 1 stressed that it was especially important for them to observe the very first lesson being taught to a beginner. Teacher 3 suggested that as well as taking on board the especially good aspects of what they observe, they should be encouraged to introduce and experiment with their own ideas. Teacher 7 suggested that where direct observation was not possible, novice teachers could learn from watching lessons that have been videotaped; regardless of which method of observation is used, she stressed the importance of following this up with a discussion of the lesson, noting what was occurring and how successful it was. In addition to suggesting observation as part of a broad approach, Teacher 8 recommended that novice teachers undertake a ‘formal’ study of piano teaching, and attend concerts. Teacher 9 said that she arranges special sessions for some of her select, interested students so that they can observe and discuss her approaches to teaching. Teacher 10 (whose mother is a piano teacher), spoke strongly in favour of using an ‘observational journal’, in which one records whether the goals of the lesson were achieved and how the teacher handled the personality of the child or

particular circumstances that arose; “After doing this for some time, you have your own record of what to do with certain students.” Some teachers (Ts 2, 5, 7, 8) placed emphasis on specific study, ranging from a Teachers Diploma from a recognised examining body, like the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music or Trinity Guildhall, to a tertiary qualification. Reading appropriate books (and research) on the subject of teaching was also recommended (Ts 2, 4, 5 8). Finally, it is salutary to heed the advice of Teacher 3: “First, they must have a desire to teach”. Similarly, the observation by Teacher 2 that “We always teach from how we were taught” should be borne in mind by all beginning teachers, for the way in which we were taught is not necessarily the best way – and is certainly not the only way!

The second question asked of the interviewees under the topic of ‘Novice Teachers’ was what advice they would give to those starting out. This elicited a range of responses, some of which duplicated what had been said previously. For example, the importance of observing other teachers was again stressed (Ts 2, 4) as was reading extensively (Ts 2, 8); Teacher 8 also spoke of learning from other teachers, attending concerts, and enrolling in workshops and seminars. Teacher 3 underscored the importance of anyone embarking on a teaching career having a love for the profession, adding that they should not see it merely as a way of making money. In similar vein, Teacher 9 referred to the need, first and foremost, to have a love of imparting knowledge to others. Other personal qualities identified by Teacher 9 were having a suitable personality for teaching, patience, and an open-mind; she added that piano teaching “is not an ‘in-out business’: it’s a long journey where one can come to enjoy the fruit of what one has planted.” The importance of having patience was also raised by Teacher 3; and that of having an open mind was also mentioned by Teacher 10. Further, Teacher 10 drew attention to the need for proper planning and preparation, stressing that one should be ‘professional’ at all times. Teacher 5 similarly referred to planning and preparation, including teachers considering carefully the practical and theoretical tutors they would use, keeping in mind the age of the child. Teacher 7 discussed the pedagogical benefits of not divorcing theory from practice; in addition, she drew attention to the need for ongoing evaluation in teaching, reminding us that “Every student is different: some methods or approaches will not suit all students; one need to adjust one’s teaching to the particular needs of students.” Teacher 6 also highlighted student differences or ability and the need to tailor teaching accordingly, adding that these days, with increasing demands on children, the piano teacher must consider the amount of time that a student can give to practice. Underpinning all of this, she suggested was the need for a sense of humour. Teacher 1 noted the importance of novice teachers understanding the educational maxim that we should teach from the known to the unknown.

Topic 3: Teacher skills, knowledge and qualities

Three questions were asked in relation to this topic:

- What do you consider to be important skills for novice teachers?
- What are essential skills and qualities of a successful teacher with respect to beginner and elementary students?
- In what ways can piano teachers continue to develop their musical and teaching abilities?

Not surprisingly, in response to the first question, What do you consider to be important skills for first-time teachers?, respondents stressed the importance of having basic musical knowledge as well as basic teaching knowledge. One means of ensuring at least a modicum of knowledge in both areas is completion of a music teaching certificate or diploma. At the same time, Teacher 5 underscored the difference between having knowledge and being able to impart it. It was suggested by Teacher 8 that first-time teachers should have a music teaching diploma, an understanding of teaching and performance technique, a reasonable knowledge of repertoire, and should have observed some classes. “That should get them started.” Some teachers then went on to stress the need for ongoing professional development. As Teacher 6 put it: “They must carry on looking, learning, researching, and improving.” Teacher 4 said: “There are always many new things to learn in music and it never ends.” Teacher 9 stated: “To survive, and not stay stagnant, teachers need to learn all the time.” Teacher 2, referring to the importance of regular professional development, argued that “the more we refresh ourselves, the more we will be able to inspire our students”; this was similarly stated by Teachers 8 and 9. In this context, Teacher 10 added a cautionary note, suggesting that where teachers are constantly giving out, and neglecting their own development, they will be drained and less efficient.

It was generally agreed that first-time teachers must have a reasonable level of performance – and sight-reading – skills, not least because of a need to be able to demonstrate to students. Teachers 4 and 9 noted that this requires regular practice, which can lead to increased confidence. Teacher 2 went one step further, arguing that it was not enough to be a good performer and a good teacher: an ability to establish effective public relations with parents is also essential.

The second question in Topic 3 was: What are essential skills and qualities of a successful teacher with respect to beginner and elementary students? Teacher 5 spoke especially strongly of the need for all of the fundamentals to be taught correctly from the

beginning. She stressed that early detection and correction of mistakes were vital; to neglect this not only leads to bad habits, but makes subsequent correction much more difficult and at times nigh impossible. Teacher 1 drew attention to the need for a teacher to be sufficiently alert to be able to “spot weaknesses” and correct them when they occur; in the hands of some teachers they go unrecognised or simply ignored. It is further incumbent on the teacher to show students how to practise to avoid such mistakes in the future. This entails a teacher developing from the start an ability in students to increasingly recognise their weaknesses; it is part of the process of self-assessment. Unfortunately, with some teachers, this is a skill that is neglected in the early lessons – even early years. Teacher 8 stressed that it is essential that students develop the art of listening perceptively and critically to their own playing. It is a skill that many students do not develop naturally and one that can pose a considerable challenge for the teacher. Most teachers referred to the importance of developing a good rhythmic sense from the earliest lessons; students often require considerable help in learning to count effectively and play rhythmically.

In discussing the essential skills and qualities of a successful teacher, some interviewees drew attention to students’ individual differences, recognizing that it is essential to adapt teaching to suit the learning abilities and styles of each student. Teachers 5 and 7 advocated having at least a basic understanding of child psychology. Teacher 6 opined: “The teacher must have the ability to gauge and adapt to each student, as everyone is different.” Teacher 10 stated that even where lessons are carefully planned, “the teacher must always be prepared to adapt to the circumstances of the student.” Teacher 5 expressed it as having the ability to be open to unexpected situations that might arise during a lesson. The same point was made by Teacher 7: “Always be flexible and adjust to each child’s needs as required.” Some teachers highlighted the need for teachers to adjust their teaching to the particular age group of students, being cognizant however that not even all children of the same age will learn and progress uniformly. Again, this goes back to the issue of individual differences. The essential point, made strongly by Teachers 6, 7 and 10, is that teachers must have an ability to communicate effectively – indeed, to have a strong rapport – when working with children regardless of their particular age or rate of learning.

Competence in lesson planning was another area highlighted by some teachers when discussing essential skills and qualities of a successful teacher. In drawing attention to the need for adequate lesson planning, some teachers – and, most strongly, Teacher 10 – added the proviso that a teacher must always be prepared to change something in a lesson if a particular issue needing addressing arises. As Teacher 10 said: “Although you plan your

lesson, always be adaptable to the circumstances of the student for minor changes.” At the same time, she spoke of the paramount importance of novice teachers paying particular attention to lesson planning and timing: one of the pitfalls of so many beginner teachers across all fields! For novice teachers especially, providing a student with enough work to do between one lesson and the next, but avoiding overloading the student, is not always easy to achieve. Indeed, attaining the right balance can be an excellent student motivator not only for practising between lessons, but also for looking forward to coming to the next lesson.

Finally, in answering the question, What are the skills and qualities of a successful teacher?, some interviewees identified personal skills – as distinct from musical and teaching knowledge – that they felt desirable in first-time teachers. Of course, it needs to be acknowledged, that many personal qualities will be developed over time. What, at least, one might expect initially are the seeds of such qualities. But this does not address the perennial question of whether there is a ‘personality’ type for piano teaching (indeed, teaching in general). Teacher 6 stated what is generally taken for granted: piano teachers must have a love of music, a desire to teach, and a love of children. Teachers 3, 6 and 9 suggested that this is the basis for becoming passionate about teaching piano. To this, Teachers 2, 8 and 9 added what they regarded as another essential skill: an ability to inspire students. High on the list of basic personal skills were patience and understanding (identified by all 10 teachers). Teacher 2 best summed-up the issue of patience, suggesting that novice teachers should understand that “We all try to be patient, and sometimes we can’t. But we can learn to control our personal characteristics. This is not something we can learn in a day, nor is it something we can learn from a textbook; it develops over the years.” Teacher 7, similarly, suggested that patience is a quality that can be learnt. Teacher 2 also identified the need for piano teachers to display warmth or empathy towards their students. Teachers 3, 5, 6 and 10 spoke of the need for empathy and understanding, which, for Teacher 3, “is first and foremost”. To this Teachers 1, 3 and 8 added the importance of continual encouragement. Teacher 10 stated that one “should have authority, but be gentle”; Teacher 3 put it as being “firm and friendly”. Teachers 4, 5 and 6 identified a sense of humour as being important”, with Teacher 5 putting it as: “Patience and humour” are assets that novice teachers must cultivate and use. Teacher 10 opined that novice teachers “should be enthusiastic and creative ... be interested in the students and not only their progress on the piano, but also their overall welfare.” She added, that piano teachers should have a broad outlook on music, including a familiarity with contemporary artists beyond pianists. Some play and teach very well but may “not have the attribute skills of a teacher...

and cannot show warmth, or concern” says Teacher 2. To this, Teacher 7 added the importance of a teacher having a rapport not only with the student, but also the parents.

The third and final question in Topic 3 was: In what ways can piano teachers continue to develop their musical and teaching abilities? All of the interviewees suggested one or more avenues for self-improvement; this included attending seminars, workshops, conferences and master classes. With one exception, all of them noted that in addition to what this can do to develop their musical and teaching skills, attendance at such events also can provide valuable opportunities for teachers to socialize – the importance of which should not be underestimated. Teachers 7 and 9 suggested that these events provide a valuable opportunity for novice teachers to meet and learn from experienced, successful teachers. Nearly all teachers spoke of the benefits of attending live concerts. Teacher 1 noted that, among other benefits, this can assist teachers in matters of interpretation. Teacher 3 highlighted the value of attending concerts at which a range of musical styles and genres are presented, including jazz and blues. Teacher 10 suggested that even attending a performance rehearsal can be of benefit. Given that all of the teachers presented students for ABRSM examinations, it is not surprising that they mentioned the value of seminars conducted by this body. Referring to these and other seminars, Teacher 2 stated: “Learning is a life-long process. Be enthusiastic about learning more, and be interested enough to reflect this in your own teaching”. Teacher 6 was referring to a diverse range of sources of professional development when she opined: “What we learn is eclectic; we pick-up tips here and there: the good ones we can incorporate into lessons and they become much more effective.”

In addition to highlighting the benefits of attending live performances, most interviewees mentioned the value of listening to CDs and watching DVDs. In this context, Teacher 2 stressed the benefits of CDs and DVDs for novice teachers living in remote areas of the country. Teacher 10 stressed the desirability of listening to CD recordings of the same work by different artists. As would be expected, interviewees also mentioned the use of books on both music and teaching as valuable sources for their personal and professional development. Teacher 4 offered some sage advice: “After reading, teachers should put into practise any new knowledge that has been gained.” Most teachers also drew attention to the benefits of technology for accessing information. Teacher 5, for example, said: “In this modern world, an electronic search is very prompt and cheap. With Internet you can type in any question and find an answer. As a teacher, this enables you to research more easily.”

In addressing the question of ways in which teachers can continue to develop their skills, most teachers made specific reference to the novice teacher. Suggestions included

observing their own teacher (Ts 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10), shadowing a teacher (T 6), studying alongside other novice teachers at specially arranged sessions (Ts 7, 9), swapping roles of both student and teacher with an experienced teacher (T 9), and attending master classes (T 9).

Finally, in addressing the question of ways in which piano teachers can continue to develop their musical and teaching abilities, six teachers (Ts 1, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10) stressed the importance of both novice and experienced teachers keeping up their own performance skills as part of their personal and professional development. The tendency for piano teachers to neglect to maintain and develop their own keyboard and performance skills is not uncommon. Teachers 4 and 8 spoke of this specifically in terms of a teachers being able to demonstrate to students. Teacher 9 offered the suggestion that even playing duets with others is one way of maintaining one's skills.

Underscoring much of the advice and discussion of competency in teachers and professional development is the fact that there is no association for music teachers in Kuala Lumpur along the lines, for example, of the Victorian Music Teachers' Association in Victoria. This is to be regretted. As Teacher 10 commented: "There should be some kind of quality control centre ... or teacher association". Such a body, she argued could be modelled on the VMTA or other associations within Australia.

Topic 4: Teaching Program

Eight questions were asked in relation to this topic:

- In your opinion, what are the basic foundations that teachers must give in the early stages to beginner students?
- What are common problems you come across when teaching beginner students?
- Do you think it necessary to set a different program for each individual student? Why?
- Do you include improvisation and other musicianship skills in your teaching program for beginner students? Why?
- How do you explore ways of meeting your students' needs?
- Do you set goals for all of your students? Give examples.
- How do you inspire a child to continue learning music for a long time?
- What are your views on group teaching?

In discussing the first question, concerned with basic foundations of music learning in the early stages for beginner students, Teachers 2 and 6 referred to the importance of singing, rhythmic games and other related activities as being an excellent pathway into playing. All

teachers made reference to technique, but emphasised different aspects, including a basic understanding of how the instrument produces sound, the patterns on the keyboard, posture, hand position, note reading and time values, touch and tone quality, and simple rudiments. Underpinning this was an emphasis on listening. As Teacher 7 said: “Right at the start of piano lessons you must train students to listen”, adding that “good habits commence from the beginning”. Some teachers went beyond the initial fundamentals associated with playing the instrument to mention the importance of encouraging students from the beginning to attend concerts. Teacher 10 introduced another perspective: “I do not give a set of rules of do’s and do not’s; I want my students to become curious and inquisitive from the start”. The same teacher offered the following, insightful comment: “The problem is assessing the true ability of a beginner. Some come as a ‘beginner’ but are not necessarily totally alien from music: they already know some things”.

The second question asked interviewees to identify common problems in teaching beginner students. Teachers identified the following: sitting posture (Ts 2, 3, 8, 9, 10) and finger posture (Ts 2, 6, 8, 9, 10); the dominance of one hand (usually the right) over the other (T 8); a lack of familiarity with the alphabet (in the case of extremely young children) (T 10); children having a very short concentration span (T 10); a dislike of technical work (T 3); and a lack of commitment to practising (Ts 1, 2, 7). Teacher 2 stated that the nature of problems varies from child to child: “Some read better, some have good rhythm – whilst others do not. Every child is different.” In similar vein, Teacher 9 observed that some students who do not like to read, play well by ear: “they all have their individual differences”.

The third question asked interviewees if they set a different program for each individual student. There was a common acknowledgement among all 10 interviewees of student differences or abilities. The real issue is to what degree teachers can or should adjust their teaching program to cater for such differences. To varying degrees, teachers acknowledged a need, at the very least to be conscious of student differences. Teacher 3 suggested that whilst every program has to be ‘tweaked’ or fine-tuned to some extent to suit the nature and ability of the student, the basics are the same. She added: “but you cannot say that one program will suit everyone”. Teacher 2 argued that every child should be treated individually: “Their reasons for learning and what they hope to gain can differ”, adding however that the best programs are those that can easily be adapted according to the particular child. Teacher 7 said a similar thing: “Teachers must have common goals for all students yet, at the same time, adapt the program to suit each student.” The same teacher underscored this point by stressing the importance of a teacher choosing, for example, appropriate examination

pieces to suit the child. Teacher 5 observed that “Some children are not able to grasp things as fast as others, so we have to tailor a program to suit them”. Teacher 6 acknowledged that children “have different interests, different strengths, and it is good to know where the strength lies, and to use it to build on areas of weakness”. She also acknowledged the importance of giving some consideration to students’ individual taste in music: “Some might want to play more popular pieces, whereas others like classical music. I try to incorporate classical music into all my lessons – but it is a question as to what degree and how much. The most important thing is to keep the children’s interest alive.” Teacher 9 was sensitive to modes of perception, arguing that “Some are more gifted in visual perception, while others have a natural sense of aural perception”. Finally, Teacher 10 opined: “Some have a very good rhythmic sense, but are weak at reading the treble clef or bass clef”. She also referred to a need to consider the nature of the child: “Some tend to be more ‘dreamy’ and not like fast pieces”.

The fourth question within this topic was: Do you include improvisation and other musicianship skills in your teaching program for beginner students? Why? With the exception of two teachers, all indicated introducing improvisation or some other musicianship skills. Six teachers indicated using improvisation: Teacher 2 referred to “free improvisation on the black keys, using three notes”; Teacher 6 mentioned “simple improvisation”; and Teacher 7 “some improvisation, but with certain students only”. Teachers 3, 5 and 10 specifically discussed transposition within the context of creativity: Teacher 5 noted that “it helps their aural sense”; Teacher 10 said that “this helps them to be more creative in their compositions”, and Teacher 3 referred to the benefits of improvisation in helping students “to develop their own style and creativity”. Four teachers referred to the use of transposition. Teacher 4 mentioned that she recently began encouraging students to do “simple one-line transpositions in the treble clef”; Teacher 9 noted that in learning how to transpose students “become more versatile in their keyboard skills”; Teacher 6 referred to “simple transposition from the very beginning”; and, in slight contrast, Teacher 2 said that “sometimes we have to wait a bit before introducing it”. Teacher 6 said that she incorporated chord progressions in her teaching from the early stages: “cadences and the circle of fifths, because it helps them with their learning and understanding of their pieces, helps them to recognize patterns, and helps aural as well as reading ability”; Teacher 10 noted that she assists children to play “some chords to support a melody line”; and Teacher 7 referred to teaching aspects of harmony, “but with certain students only”. In responding to the question, some teachers drew attention to the time factor. Teachers 1 and 8 said that this prevented them from introducing such skills with

beginner students: Teacher 1 said, “I would love to do this, but unfortunately time does not permit”, and Teacher 8 said, “Ideally it would be good, but because of time constraints it is not possible: we would need to have another class especially for it”. Finally, some teachers also noted that particular skills require special talent and so they are selective with the students to whom they introduce these skills. This was best summarised by Teacher 7: “Not every child has that type of talent and every student’s needs are different; it depends on the student. Also the lesson time is limited.” To this Teacher 6 added: “As teachers of classical music we are not fully trained to teach improvisation”.

The fifth question asked how teachers explored ways of meeting their students’ needs? Teacher 4 said that she begins doing this at the initial interview with a student, “inquiring why they want to learn music”; she also asks the parents and based on the feedback from both students and their parents said, “I have to adjust to their needs”. Teachers 2, 3, 6 and 9 also stressed the importance of talking with students to ascertain their interest in music. For example, Teacher 6 said, “In terms of keeping their interest I play pieces for them, and talk to them. In terms of other needs, I try my best to adapt during the lesson. That takes a lot of time, but they are all so different”. Teacher 7 said “Every student has different needs: usually from their playing you can see if this is musical or technical, and from there you work it out”. Teacher 5 responded to the question with respect to their technical needs: “For example, why they don’t understand scales: is it the fingering or the key signatures? So I think of simple ways to help them understand”. Teacher 2 said: “Sometimes I give them pieces for which there are recordings and they can choose which one to learn”. Teacher 8 advocated introducing students to a broad repertoire in order to ascertain what they like: “play different styles – not just classical”. Teacher 3 also stressed trying to “find out what they like”; to which she added that it was important to know how much time they could spend on practice. Teacher 9 said that she takes students to master classes and concerts as a means of meeting certain musical needs and following this up with a discussion; this also helps her to “see what they like”. Teacher 10 advocated understanding the students’ interests beyond music as a means of gaining greater insights into what they like and, wherever possible, using this as a teaching tool. Underscoring all of this, cautioned Teacher 2, is that “sometimes the teacher’s plan might not be perfect for the learner, so I constantly review my plan”.

The sixth question was: Do you set goals for all of your students? Give examples. Teacher 10 said that goals are a “must for all students at whatever level”, adding the importance of praise and encouragement together with acknowledgement of goals that have been achieved. Teacher 1 stressed the need to set different goals for different types of students.

Teacher 9 drew attention to the importance of a teacher showing a student how to achieve goals that had been set, for example, “how to practise to improve weekly”. Teachers 2, 4, 7 and 8 suggested that examinations can function as goals, with Teacher 2 stressing that the curriculum must be planned “to improve on weaknesses”, and Teacher 8 stressing the accomplishment of mastering the pieces rather than the exam itself. Teacher 7 suggested that a range of performance opportunities can also function as goals, for example, playing for a gathering of family members, a school concert, or an occasion of celebration such as a Christmas concert. To this Teacher 6 added playing for one’s peers in group classes and in competitions. Finally, Teacher 10 spoke of “quiet goals” or goals that the teacher sets but does not discuss with the student to avoid any sense of pressure.

Question 7 asked teachers how they inspired a child to continue learning. Teacher 7 observed that “almost every child loves music; it is natural for anyone to like music”. She added however that “to be able to play the child must learn to like practising – and the way to do this must be shown to the student”. Many teachers and parents might argue that herein lies a dilemma: a love of music is not the same as a love of practice! Teacher 7 noted the importance of children practising on an instrument that is in good condition and in tune: where this is not the case, the incentive for practising is understandably diminished. Equally importantly, she said, was the teacher’s role in encouraging a student to practise, “and good music will inspire this”. Teacher 1 stressed the importance of praise and encouragement. Teachers 2, 3, 5 and 6 referred to the importance of students being allowed to play music that they like as one means of inspiring them to practise, with Teacher 3 adding that this could be music from “musical shows, theme songs from the latest movies . . . or from going to concerts”. Teacher 6 advocated children attending group classes where they can listen to each other and “have fun and the opportunity to share what they have learnt”. She also supported children listening to selected CDs and DVDs oriented towards children. Teacher 8 also advocated students playing in concerts “to showcase their playing and share each other’s feelings” as a means of inspiration. Similarly Teacher 10 argued that varied opportunities to perform in concerts, “to play and observe what others can do” can also inspire children to continue learning. Teacher 9 spoke of the importance of children being introduced to a wide range of music in order “to see the bigger picture” and be inspired by it. Teacher 5 referred to the use psychology as a basis for understanding and inspiring students.

Question 8 asked for teachers’ views on group teaching. Four of them (Ts 4, 5, 7, 8) had not experienced this, but three indicated a desire to do so. The remaining teachers (Ts 1, 2, 3, 6, 9 and 10) were advocates of group teaching. As Teacher 6 put it: “It depends on the

children and what kind of work you want to do ... it can work very well with young children". She added: "Children can have a spirited and lively time, and share their experiences with friends – and this encourages and sustains their interest". Teacher 9 suggested that children generally enjoy group classes and they function as an incentive for them to practise in preparation for the next lesson. Four of the teachers (Ts 2, 3, 9 and 10) suggested that learning in a group saves time. Teacher 10 argued that "studying with others can stimulate progress and improvement – especially in theory, which can be rather dull and uninteresting when studied alone". Teacher 2 spoke of the importance of students being able to make music together, but acknowledged that teachers have to be careful not to neglect individual needs. Teachers 1, 6, 7 and 8 also raised the issue of individual attention, with Teacher 8 – who had not taught a group class – saying "There is not enough attention, and details are not checked". Teacher 7 said: "Most parents think that individual lessons will definitely produce better results". Finally, it should be understood that the concept of a group lesson can vary from two or three students to a much larger group. Teacher 10 advocated a different version of group lessons: where students have overlapping lessons which gives them an opportunity to play for and hear each other; this can be particularly useful when a student is preparing for a performance.

Topic 5: Sight- reading

Two questions were asked in relation to this topic:

- How do you encourage students who are weak in sight-reading to practise it?
- How do you help students with sight-reading during the lesson?

Teacher 1 said that she gives students a short sight-reading exercise at every lesson and if a student experiences any problems they must practise it at home and play it again at the following lesson, at which they are given a new piece to sight-read. Teacher 2 commented that students do not like practising sight-reading, partly, she suggested, because some of the published sight-reading exercises are not melodically appealing. She chooses pieces at a lower standard at which students are playing, and ones that have interest to the student. Teacher 3 favoured 'prepared' sight-reading, whereby a student is given a piece to sight-read and learn at home, and then plays it for the teacher at the following lesson. In the process, she chooses pieces that focus on particular weaknesses, sometimes addressing them through duet playing with the student. Teacher 4 similarly referred to giving students pieces that are not too difficult to prepare at home. She also mentioned using every new piece as a sight-reading piece so that students get a general view of the work. Where necessary, she will play one hand, whilst the student plays the other. After analyzing a student's weakness, Teacher 5 chooses pieces of a

simple level that address the issue. If there is a problem with rhythm, she often requires student to clap the rhythm of the melody before playing it; if the problem is the reading of notation, she chooses pieces based on the 'five finger' position. Teacher 6 stressed that in order to improve in sight-reading, students must play lots of pieces. Teacher 7 observed that students generally do not like practising sight-reading, so she gives them pop songs or Disney tunes to sight-read as these are pieces that they love; she only uses such music for sight-reading purposes. The advice of Teacher 8 is that students should practise sight-reading every day, and this includes revising previous sight-reading pieces; in addition to students clapping the dominant rhythms they are also encouraged to observe the shape of the melody before commencing, insisting that they do not commence playing until they have spent at least 30 seconds studying the piece. Teacher 9 noted the prevalence of poor sight-readers, suggesting that part of the problem for some students is fear of the unknown when they are not familiar with a piece, so she encourages students to approach it in small steps to ensure success, which can function as a form of motivation for further practise. Teacher 10 stressed that, from the beginning, a good sight-reader needs to form good habits in practising sight-reading, commencing with counting and mastering the art of rhythm; the next issue is learning how to read and play the notes. Perhaps it was Teacher 4 who best summarized the importance of learning to become a proficient sight-reader: "Those who can read well will play more music, learn faster, and enjoy music for the rest of their lives."

The second question within Topic 5 asked how teachers help students with sight-reading during the lesson. Teachers 1, 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10 pointed out basic considerations that need to be stressed on beginner students during a lesson, such as observance of the time and key signatures and the importance of counting. Teacher 8 advocated getting students to clap the rhythms before commencing. Teacher 1 said: "I always ask them to start off by counting slowly when sight-reading until they are confident, and then they can increase the speed". Some teachers referred to problems in note-reading, especially in the bass clef (Ts 1, 3). Teachers 3, 4 and 10 mentioned that they play duets with their students during the lesson to help develop their sight-reading; Teacher 10 said she introduces duets at two or three levels lower than their standard of playing. Teachers 1, 4 and 7 stressed that they spend time on sight-reading at every lesson. Teachers 4, 5 and 6 spoke of the relationship between a sense of keyboard geography and the development of good sight-reading skills. Teacher 4 said: "I cover their hands to avoid them looking at the keyboard when training them in sight-reading". Teacher 6 spoke of requiring students "to feel with their fingers so they do not have to look down at their hands ... Show them how to 'feel' the relative distances, like a fifth or octave.

Teach one stationary hand position, with students keeping their eyes on the score; later move the hand position.” Teacher 5 advocated students learning “to study the piece with their eyes” before commencing to play, noting not only time and key signatures and the contours of the piece, but also changes in hand position. Teacher 7 also mentioned the importance of studying the contours of a piece. Teachers 6 and 10 said that when working on sight-reading during lessons they helped students to look ahead and memorise two or three notes at a time as a means of becoming more fluent. Underscoring many of the teachers’ responses was the importance of giving students pieces that they might reasonably be expected to master, based on a belief that mastery is an important form of motivation and leads to further success. This, of course, relates to the previous question: if students experience success in sight-reading in their lesson and are given appropriate techniques to develop it further, they are more likely to practise it at home.

Topic 6: Practice

Two questions were asked in relation to this topic:

- ‘Practice makes perfect!’ How do you encourage your students’ to practise?
- What is your advice to students who do not practise enough but still want to continue to learn music?

In responding to the first question, teachers in general acknowledged that getting students to practise could be a problem. Teacher 2 opined that many students do not understand the necessity of practising “and this means that teachers have to put in a lot of effort to make them do it”. Teachers 4, 5 and 9 suggested that in some cases students might not understand or have developed good practice habits, suggesting that some merely play their pieces aimlessly from beginning to end. Teachers 4, 7, 9 and 10 advocated identifying the weak or problem areas and concentrating on these. Teacher 7, further, spoke of giving students “short practice goals so that they do not have to practice for too long”. Teachers 4 and 6 mentioned the importance of students also having longer term goals to work towards, such as concerts, competitions and examinations; to these Teachers 2, 7, 8 and 9 advocated a range of ‘smaller’ performance opportunities. All of these have the potential to function as a form of motivation and reward for practising well. Teacher 2 suggested that there were two ways to encourage practice: assign students pieces they like (a suggestion also made by Teacher 4), or go through the piece “bar by bar” at the lesson, and give them directions for practising it to ensure they are confident enough to work on it at home. Teachers 6 and 7 expressed similar sentiments, with Teacher 7 pointing out that students must be “persistent and patient ... [as]

nothing comes easy”, at the same time stressing that teachers must continually reinforce the benefits of practice.

In addition to addressing musical and pedagogical issues relating to practice, teachers also made mention of other aspects that needed to be considered. Teachers 2 and 5, attributed the problem of practice in part to students’ involvement in so many activities after school, suggesting that they are often too tired to practise. Teachers 7 and 9 mentioned the importance of the home environment being one that is conducive to constructive practice. Teacher 9 said: “Some parents are ignorant of distractions around the house, such as the television being placed next to the piano or other siblings creating a disturbance”. She also noted that sometimes it is the quality of piano itself that is an impediment to effective practice. Teacher 10 suggested that sibling rivalry could also be an issue, with a weaker child not being motivated to reach the standard of another brother or sister. Teachers 4, 5, 8 and 9 suggested that students be given a practice timetable which is overseen by parents. Teacher 10 suggested that structuring lessons such that one student’s lesson overlaps another’s can act as a motivator for practice, especially if they are learning the same piece. Teachers 1, 2 3, 4, 6, 9 and 10 spoke of the benefits of praise and reward as an incentive for practice; of course, praise itself is a form of reward. Of course, as Teacher 9 acknowledged, the problem might simply be that the student is lazy.

The second question asked of teachers under Topic 6 was: What is your advice to students who do not practise enough but still want to continue to learn music? At one extreme was the sentiment of Teacher 2 who suggested that the only way is to “sit on them ... to make sure they move on; this will take a long time but it is the only way”. Teacher 8 suggested commencing with a short practice period and very gradually increasing it, at the same time as stressing on the student “that there is no way to progress without practice; that is the only way. Talk to the parents or talk to the student and ask exactly what her interests are. If she is really not interested she might as well take a break and do other things.” Teacher 3 observed that such students will have a ‘tender spot’ and encouraged trying to find out what this was as a means of understanding and assisting the child to continue to develop. Teacher 4 suggested giving students pieces of their choice, including blues, jazz or works by Richard Clayderman, noting that this can often motivate them to practise more than normally. Teacher 5 suggested that having a goal, such as wanting to play a piece for friends or family – or even simply their own pleasure – can often result in increased practice. Teacher 6 suggested not stressing the amount or frequency of practice but, rather, approaching it as something that the student could do when he or she has the inclination; removing the pressure of having to practise can

sometimes have good results. Teacher 7 said that sometimes hearing their peers play will inspire students to work harder; to this end, she holds performance classes to give her students the opportunity to play for others. Teacher 9 noted that she would speak to the parents to ascertain their expectations for their child; she accepts that for many parents and children, music is “only a subsidiary subject and not considered as important as mathematics, language and science”. In this case, Teacher 9 would be prepared to continue teaching the student as long as she wished to continue with her lessons and as long as the parents did not have any desire for their child to sit for music examinations. Teacher 10 spoke of instituting incentives as a means of inspiring a student to make a commitment to practice. This might include, on the one hand, taking them to concerts to hear instrumentalists or, on the other, putting them in a class with another student of a similar age and standard and hoping that a competitive element would be sparked in the recalcitrant student that would result in them practising more. Of course, the problem of a student who is reluctant to practise is well-known to most if not all instrumental teachers. Understanding, encouragement and patience are all valuable attributes that teachers can bring to such a situation. It is not uncommon for some students to reach a hiatus in their learning, with some being content to ‘tread water’ for a time; if sensitively handled this can, in the long run, have positive benefits.

Topic 7: Theory of music

Only one question was asked: What can teachers do to encourage students to study music theory as part of learning the piano? Teacher 1 stressed the importance of students having a proper understanding of the work set and then enlisting parents’ support to ensure that tasks set by the teacher are completed at home. She also cautioned against over-burdening the student with theory tasks to be completed at home – as did Teachers 6 and 9. In situations where children do not complete work set for them, Teacher 5 stressed the importance of finding out the reason and then addressing it. Teacher 2 favoured students completing their theory at the end of the lesson, prior to going home. Some teachers noted that not all students like theory. In such a situation, Teacher 6 advised using a theory book that is easy-to-understand; she also suggested that the teacher has a spare copy of the theory book that a student is working on in case it is not brought to the lesson. Teacher 3 advocated the importance of teachers making the link between theory and a student’s playing; suggesting that this can provide an incentive to learn more about the theoretical underpinnings of music. Teacher 8 highlighted the link between theory and aural activities. Teacher 9 suggested that doing theory exercises encourages children to think more about music in general; she also

favoured children doing fun exercises with the teacher during the lesson as a means of making the activity enjoyable. Teachers 7 and 10 favoured teaching theory in groups of two or three students, as distinct from incorporating it into the piano lesson; for some students this is a more appealing and effective approach and allows for engagement with fellow students. Only one of the teachers (T4) said that she did not experience any problems in getting children to study theory.

Topic 8: Music examinations

The question asked of teachers was: What are your views on music examinations? Opinions varied widely. Some teachers argued against students sitting for an examination every year. Teacher 1 added: “Different students cope differently with examinations and we have to be our own judge”; she noted however, that examinations “are a means of keeping lazy students working”. Teacher 2 identified both advantages and disadvantages of examinations, suggesting that whilst they can provide an indication of achievement on the one hand, in situations where teachers, parents or students are obsessed with them, they can lose sight of the real value of learning music; “Music exams should be seen as a tool and not the goal or sole objective in learning the piano”. Teacher 3 favoured sending students for examinations only if they were ready for them, but certainly not every year; she placed emphasis instead on building-up repertoire. For her an examination is only “a check or validation that a student has reached a certain level”. She had no objection to children skipping examinations in the lower grade levels. Teacher 4 was of a similar opinion, adding that some students do not like examinations primarily because of the technical work they have to do. She went even further to say that if they only play exam pieces they do not enjoy learning. Teacher 5 opined: “Exams have their usefulness to a certain extent” in that they are an indicator of a student’s level and can act as a form of encouragement for some students, “but they and the collecting of certificates cannot be taken as the final achievement”. She also pointed out that in preparing for an examination students are engaging in a number of areas associated with development in playing, including performing “for a total stranger”. Teacher 6 was another who acknowledged individual differences among students: “Music exams work differently for different students; you have to be flexible and see how it works with each individual kid”. She too did not advocate a student sitting for an exam every year, highlighting the responsibility of the teacher to select pieces that are appropriate to a child’s age and interest level. She further suggested that teachers acquaint themselves with the syllabuses of a range of examination boards as a means of selecting appropriate repertoire for students to

study. Teacher 7 was another who argued for flexibility, suggesting that while they can provide a goal they are sometimes approached too rigidly: “Students must do other things and there are some who are not suitable for exams: the teacher needs to decide if there is a benefit in sitting for them”. She also highlighted the situation with some parents who were overly ambitious and wanted their children to skip grade levels; if she accedes to this it is based on her own assessment of the child’s ability and she reserves the right not to allow the child to sit if the work is not up to standard. Whilst Teacher 8 found some merit in examinations, especially as an indicator of achievement, the negative “is that you end up playing three pieces for a long time”. She elaborated: “If you do not prepare them early, you may not have enough time, but if you do it just drags on for six months ... [I like to] introduce some other pieces in-between, but when students return to the exam pieces, they have difficulty playing them”. Teacher 9 spoke particularly strongly against examinations: “After I graduated and returned to Malaysia I wanted to put up a sign saying ‘I am not giving music exams’. I think that in our society we are paper-chasers”. She argued that examinations can place unnecessary pressure on students that interferes with their learning: “You can damage them as they are very tender”. She has however relaxed her attitude and accepts that an examination can provide a goal and be used as a tool for learning – but only “if the time is right”, suggesting further that the child should sit for a grade lower than his or her standard “because in this way they can perform really well”. She also offers parents and children the opportunity of ‘in-house’ examinations which “can build-up a child’s confidence”. Teacher 10 argued that merit of examinations from the perspective of giving children a sense of achievement. Like some others however, she observed that not all students can cope with the stress of examinations and this “takes away the enjoyment of playing”. Further, “many students do not get to widen their repertoire because they’re too busy polishing their exam pieces”. She spoke strongly of duet examinations “which are less threatening”, adding that duet playing addresses the problem of pianists not – unlike other instrumentalists – playing with others and sharing the joy and challenges of this ensemble experience.

Topic 9: Parental guidance

The question asked under this topic was: Do you think that parental guidance is a help or hindrance to students? The interviewees identified a range of issues in relation both aspects. On the positive side, some said that, ideally, parents should have basic musical knowledge, although Teacher 2 recognised the reality that “Parents may not know what to do”. Even so, Teacher 1 said: “When it comes to more advanced levels it can be difficult”. The importance

of parents taking some responsibility for students' practice was recognised: this might range from reminding them to practice (Ts 3, 4, 5, 8), to supervising or coaching them (Ts 1, 4, 6, 7, 8). Certainly, if a parent can assist a child in practising or playing correctly, it will lead to greater improvement by the following lesson. Teacher 7 acknowledged the importance of parental guidance, noting that they are with the child every day, as distinct from the piano teacher who only sees them once-a-week; at the same time she commented: "Some parents do get in the way". Teacher 10 suggested that parental supervision can also make practise more interesting for the student. But Teacher 4 drew attention to the fact that some children do not like being supervised; she suggested instead the notion of a child inviting a parent for help when needed. Somewhat similarly, Teacher 8 spoke of a parent's role as being more one of 'checking' than complete supervision. Teacher 9 spoke positively of the role some of her parents played in ensuring that their child behaved during the lesson itself.

In discussing the second part of the question – whether parents were a hindrance – a range of issues was raised. Teachers 1 and 8 identified the problem of parents providing incorrect coaching. Teacher 2 put it: "Sometimes parents tell them to practise wrongly, so I'd rather just do it myself [without parental help]". Teacher 3 spoke of the "over-anxious" parent who "makes the child feel inferior by making comparisons with other children's progress". For Teacher 5, parental interference in general can be a problem – especially when it comes to the child's interpretation of a piece: "They confuse the child". Teacher 9 complained about parents who are too strict in general at home. Teacher 6 expressed concern about the type of parent who criticizes a child during the lesson, drawing attention to the psychological damage this can do: "it kind of deflates the whole thing." Finally, Teacher 10 was critical of the child who has a parent with a music qualification and who makes unreasonable demands of the child – "That can scare them away" – as well as the parent who has been taught differently from their child and tries to impose their own teaching methods: "This just confuses them".

Topic 10: Advice for teachers

Two questions were asked in relation to this topic:

- What advice would you give to all piano teachers – novice and experienced?
- From your personal adventure in teaching please related anything that you think might benefit novice teachers.

In responding to the first question, What advice would you give to all piano teachers – novice and experienced?, Teacher 1 suggested that in addition to reflecting on the methods by which they were taught, teachers should study instructional books. Teacher 2 stressed the

importance of life-long learning whereby teachers continue to widen their horizons and engage in professional development. Teacher 4 pointed out that “There is no end to learning; be equipped with new knowledge”. Teacher 10 stated: “One must not think that there is nothing else to learn: there is always something new”, that may be important for equipping teachers to work even more effectively with students; further, by attending seminars and engaging in other professional development activities, “teachers are refreshed and sometimes reminded of things they may have forgotten”. Teacher 3 advocated “moving with the times” and keeping abreast of current developments in the field of piano education. Teacher 5 stressed the importance of patience and tolerance. The advice of Teacher 6 was to “strike a balance and know when and how much to push, and when to let go, relax and have fun”, to which she added the importance of having a sense of humour. Teacher 8 also mentioned making lessons “fun and enjoyable”. Teacher 7 spoke of the importance of never losing the love and enjoyment of teaching and said that if teachers ever find this is dissipating they should do their best to rekindle the passion they once had. Teacher 9 emphasised the need for novice teachers to have “a certain [pianistic] standard in order to be able to demonstrate to pupils”; to this end she recommended that they “continue playing and widening their repertoire and attending concerts”.

The next thing asked of the interviewees was to relate anything from their own teaching that they think might benefit novice teachers. Teacher 3 spoke of not forcing students to learn the piano when they clearly dislike doing so: “a break can be healthy”. She highlighted an experience with a young girl who repeatedly refused to get out of her mother’s car to go to lessons; after being allowed to stop learning, she returned to the piano three years later with a new-found enthusiasm and went on to complete her Grade 8 exams. A similar sentiment was also expressed by Teacher 7. Teacher 5 drew attention to some of the benefits and issues associated with teaching children with special needs, noting that whilst often it is a slow process, it can also be an extremely rewarding one – for both the student and the teacher. Teacher 6 mentioned three things: firstly, the importance of teachers being aware of the strong impact they can have on a student and the need to consider carefully how they approach every child; secondly she reflected on how rewarding it can be for a teacher when a student experiences success in their playing; and finally she cautioned against teachers being too result-oriented and neglecting to focus on the enjoyment of playing for oneself – a pleasure that a child can have for life. Teacher 7 reflected that it is not uncommon for some children to go through a stage when they want to stop learning or practising; however, if sensitively handled, she argued, “we teachers can encourage them and pull them through this period of

time ... eventually they appreciate our patience and dedication; nothing is wasted". Teacher 9 spoke of the damage that over ambitious parents can do to a child; she related the story of a transfer student who, when she came to her, was disinterested, but she managed to rekindle the girl's love of playing the piano. Unfortunately, when the parents insisted that the girl do Grade 8 exam and the teacher suggested waiting for another six months the parents took her away. Her advice to novice teachers is not only to establish a good relationship with parents but, if this becomes difficult, to stick to their principles. The advice to teachers given by Teacher 10 is to interview parents before accepting a new student in order to ascertain their expectations – which can range from learning merely as a hobby to becoming an extremely proficient performer; adding that parents' expectations can both help and hinder a child's enjoyment and success.

This is the conclusion of the discussion of the responses of the 59 teachers who responded to the survey and the 10 teachers who were interviewed. The following chapter presents the book on piano teaching, specifically written for novice teachers in Malaysia, that is based in part on these findings: the Book is also based on the experience of the researcher as a piano teacher over three decades as well as a study of the literature.

CHAPTER 5: THE BOOK

Developing a guidebook for beginning piano teachers

This research study was undertaken with the aim of developing a guidebook for beginning piano teachers in Malaysia. From my research findings, suggestions emerged that provided ideas, concepts and viewpoints on various methods and approaches in private studio teaching. Problems and issues of a generic nature are discussed alongside those specific to instrumental teaching.

A survey and interviews with piano teachers were conducted and administered to ascertain some of the areas on which teachers and students need to focus. From these two data sources (survey and interviews) a series of issues and potential solutions were presented. These include some of the challenges private music teachers have to face and encounter during their daily teaching, to new developments and ideas for improving piano teaching and learning.

From the data emerged a number of topics that were incorporated into the guide: etiquette of studio teaching, aims and goals in teaching, teaching experience, common faults in beginners, practice, musicianship development and others. Advice is provided on basic foundations for novice students and how to work with them. The subject of parental guidance is seen from different perspectives as well as advice on how to handle parents. Principles of teaching and learning are proposed, as are recommendations concerning desirable qualities in teachers – all of which help contribute to success. Students' weaknesses in learning are also addressed. Issues such as examinations and group teaching are discussed. The popularity amongst children of learning the piano in Kuala Lumpur is also discussed. So too are the benefits of learning to play an instrument. Finally, the book looks at what novice teachers can expect when they embark on a career as a piano teacher in the twenty-first century and whether there should be changes for both teachers and students.

Book Title: *Searching for answers in piano teaching*

Preface

There are many books written to guide novice piano teachers in their teaching. The contents of this book have been guided by my own research, which asked: “What are the knowledge and skills that beginner piano teachers need in order to teach a music program in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia?”

I have lived in Kuala Lumpur for nearly forty years and my teaching career has spanned this period of time. Throughout my years of teaching, I have developed a great deal of experience, knowledge and skills in the teaching of the piano; some of this has been learnt from my own professional studies, some from reading, some from attending seminars and conferences, and much has been learnt from my students themselves. It has been my wish to assist and guide novice piano teachers in the formative stages of their piano teaching career: this book is an attempt to do so. In its five chapters (which, to avoid confusion with the chapters of this project will be referred to as ‘sections’) I have addressed issues not only that I personally have had to deal with, but also ones that have been identified in the literature, and ones that have been raised by the piano teachers in Kuala Lumpur who participated in my research project. The intention of the book is to give novice piano teachers some idea of expectations, problems, and issues associated with teaching the piano to students at the beginner and elementary level. I know from personal experience that there is a need for books of this nature, which are written for a particular cohort of teachers within a particular context: in this case, Kuala Lumpur.

This guidebook is of course just that – a guide. It will not necessarily resolve all of the issues and problems that may arise; however, it will provide novice teachers with fundamental knowledge and skills for further exploration and, in the process, assist them in dealing with many issues. The book opens the way for a further publication that not only goes into more detail, but also one that addresses issues associated with more advanced students. The five sections are:

Section 1: *Studio teaching for piano teachers*

Section 2: *Establishing essentials: avoiding and addressing faults*

Section 3: *Teacher knowledge and skills*

Section 4: *Practice, Sight-reading, Musicianship skills, Group teaching*

Section 5: *Music examinations*

Many of the ideas discussed in the book have relevance for the learning of other instruments; indeed, the book could be adapted for this purpose.

Section 1: *Studio teaching for piano teachers*

Introduction

The origins of studio teaching in Malaysia are probably found during the period of British Occupation which began in the late nineteenth century; this has developed strongly in the years since the Second World War. It has since become a popular form of teaching and learning music. The strong prevalence today of examining bodies from the UK in particular attest to the popularity not only of learning the piano, but also other instruments. The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) first began examining in Malaysia in 1948.

Piano studio teaching

In Kuala Lumpur, studio teaching is known as ‘private teaching’. Most commonly, music lessons are conducted in teachers’ homes; over the past 30 years or so, a number of music schools have been established to provide private music teaching. Private teaching involves one-on-one tuition where the teacher gives full attention to the learner. Lessons are normally given weekly and the duration might vary according to the age and level of the student.

When starting out, novice teachers normally commence teaching beginners. They might teach from their home, in a music school, or travel to the student’s home. A majority of the piano teachers in Kuala Lumpur are female: there are relatively few male teachers. The advantages of studio teaching include being self-employed, being able to choose one’s own time schedule, teaching as much or as little as one likes, and, for those who teach in their own home especially, avoiding the expense of renting a studio. There is no requirement to be licensed or accredited, nor do teachers have to have a university degree in music or some other relevant qualification in music or teaching. As an increasingly large number of children in Malaysia are beginning to learn music at a young age, good teachers are in great demand.

Commencing lessons at an early age

Whilst there may be some advantages in commencing music lessons at a young age, one can begin learning at any age. Children are receptive to music from birth, however they should not commence learning until they have developed sufficiently physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. It must also be understood that every child is different in aptitude for playing the piano, personality, and readiness for learning (including knowing the alphabet,

being able to count, having a degree of hand and finger coordination and a capacity for concentration). In addition, the home environment and the nature of parental support are also important factors to be taken into consideration when a child commences learning. Whilst there is some disagreement about what age is ideal, in the final analysis it depends on each individual child. Teachers in Malaysia tend not teach a child under the age of 5.

Many teachers and parents prefer children to commence with pre-piano classes that focus on singing, dancing, rhythmic activities and the playing of percussion instruments; these are usually undertaken in a group situation. Ideally, a child should have a desire to learn. Whilst children in general love music and enjoy clapping to it or using their bodies to move to it, this of itself does not mean that they therefore will love learning the piano!

Underscoring all of this is the importance of ongoing motivation to maintain a high degree of interest and involvement – and this depends to a great degree on the skill of the teacher. In the process, a sensitive teacher will give careful consideration to the rate at which a child grasps new information and is able to perform new skills. This often requires patience and a sense of humour. In the process, a teacher may discover special talents.

As well as the intrinsic musical benefits of learning the piano and the potential of having a lifelong interest in playing, some people draw attention to other benefits for young children, such as assisting their general coordination, developing their concentration and memory, and giving them confidence to perform in front of others; but these are only ancillary and should not be the primary reason for learning.

Parental involvement

Parental support and involvement are essential for young and beginner students. Establishing a good relationship with a parent can be important for a child's progress and for maintaining interest. When well-handled, the three-way teacher-student-parent relationship will benefit all three of them. It requires understanding, tact, excellent communication skills, and often patience and perseverance on the part of the teacher.

Prior to the commencement of lessons, it is important that parents understand their role and ways in which they can contribute to their child's success. Whilst a parent's role is important, the parent must not usurp the teacher's role; unfortunately, some parents interfere and even hinder a child's progress. But again, this comes back to the importance of teachers exercising their role professionally when enlisting a parent's cooperation. The degree of a parent's involvement in a child's piano lessons will depend on the child's age and level of proficiency. Most importantly, a parent can not only remind a child to practise but, where

appropriate, sit with the child to ensure that it is done according to the directions of the teacher. It must be noted however that the motives of parents for having a child taught the piano can vary greatly: from being able to play simply for personal enjoyment, to becoming a concert pianist – and everything in between. Some parents, further, believe that learning the piano entails the necessity of sitting for piano exams; this need not be so! Some parents see learning the piano as a status symbol.

It is not uncommon for parents to shop around for a good piano teacher. From the beginning, teachers need to ensure that they present themselves as professionally as possible. Of course, a parent will not really know if the teacher-child relationship is successful until lessons have commenced. But, as has been said, it is important to stress that parents should not be allowed to interfere in the lesson: enlisting parental help can be a delicate balance. Unfortunately, some parents expect too much of a piano teacher.

Teacher-student relationship

Mention has already been made of the important role of the teacher. Teachers must at all times behave professionally. They also have a mentor role, which entails considering not only musical and technical matters relating to the child, but also having an understanding of personal characteristics and needs. This can also be expressed by saying that there must be excellent two-way communication between the teacher and the child; some would argue that this is easier said than done! Humour is often an effective tool in difficult situations. When done effectively, a successful teacher can take the child on a path of musical development, discovery and enjoyment.

Young novice teachers should enjoy children and have a desire to teach. Ideally, this will lead to a love or passion for teaching. It is essential to understand from the outset that each child is different: some may have more ‘natural’ abilities, but all have the potential to learn the piano at their own rate and derive ongoing pleasure from the experience. It is students’ differences – as well as their commonalities – that make teaching a challenging and enjoyable profession. In the process, of course, careful planning is required on the part of the teacher that acknowledges individual differences, a child’s learning needs, and many other characteristics. In this sense, a teacher has a personal relationship with each student, which, because of the one-on-one nature of piano teaching, is quite unique compared to attending school and associating with a teacher who is also responsible for many other children in the class.

In the process of learning how to teach whilst working with their own piano students, novice teachers should be aware of certain things that they should stress from the beginning. These include developing good habits with regard to hand and finger position, posture, practice, and others. Some things become increasingly difficult to address if left too late.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that teaching the piano, like other professions, has its rewards and its frustrations. When approached with solid training, confidence, and a desire to impart to children an ongoing love of music and an ability to play the piano, the rewards are great. Teachers should never lose sight of the fact that a large proportion of listening audiences world-wide developed their appreciation for music from attending instrumental lessons. In the process, music teachers have a responsibility to introduce children to a wide repertoire to enable them to enjoy music of their choice as they grow older.

Studio ethics

It is important that studio teachers are aware of their professional responsibilities. They must have sufficient knowledge and skill relating to the playing of their instrument and, from the start, adequate understanding of appropriate pedagogy that should be developed further over time. This implies having at least a recognised music teaching qualification such as a Teaching Diploma from a music examination board, or a degree in music as well as appropriate pedagogical training. As with other professions, studio teachers should continue to keep abreast of new ideas in their field – both musical and pedagogical. This includes attending concerts and other performances, listening to CDs, maintaining their professional reading and research, and ongoing reflection and assessment of their teaching.

Teachers, in effect, have an unwritten contract with students – and their parents – to provide the best quality instruction that they can and, ideally, instill in students an enjoyment in music that will continue throughout their lives. Implicit in this is a responsibility to make the learning experience as enjoyable and beneficial as possible. Although not always an easy decision to make, teachers also have a responsibility to pass a student on to another teacher if, for example, she believes this is desirable for the benefit of the student's musical development.

Punctuality should be observed by the teacher, the student and the parent: neither a teacher nor a student should have to wait to commence a lesson. Parents, further, should ensure that they are not late in picking-up their child at the conclusion of the lesson; this can cause inconvenience to the teacher and the child who has the following lesson. Teachers should also establish 'rules' relating to these and other issues, including bringing of siblings to

a lesson; often this can be a cause of distraction. Another responsibility of parents is to ensure that lessons are paid for on time.

Professional ethics demands that a teacher not criticize another teacher's work – especially in front of students. Teachers also must pay attention to personal grooming or presentation. So too must they ensure that the room in which they teach is conducive to learning. One way of addressing some issues is to develop a 'studio policy' that the parent is required to agree to.

Section 2: *Establishing essentials: avoiding and addressing faults*

Introduction

Some mistakes evident in a child's playing are the result of ignorant or careless teaching. They should have been addressed at the outset. Unfortunately, correcting ingrained mistakes is not always an easy task – for the student or the teacher. Students must understand from the beginning that playing the keyboard is more than just depressing keys: it involves technique and artistry of a high order. When establishing essentials, teachers must keep in mind the three principal modes of learning: visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic. Students prefer learn using one or two of these modes, but not all three. Visual learners tend to want to watch what their hands are doing, aural learners tend to learn best when listening to the teacher talking or demonstrating a piece, and kinaesthetic learners can find their way around the keyboard without looking; they have a good sense of keyboard geography. A good teacher will encourage all three modes of learning, but should keep in mind that teaching that uses mostly the student's weakest mode can lead to learning difficulties.

Why is a good foundation important for piano beginners?

In order to play the piano to the best of their ability, children must master certain skills, some of which must be addressed from the beginning. This includes an ability to sing in tune, to beat a pulse, to clap rhythm patterns, and to train the ear to recognise various musical elements. Some teachers will be familiar with these types of activities through their experience of such music educators as Dalcroze, Kodály, and Orff. (Whilst I am not recommending that children pursue in their entirety the teachings of any of these music educators, I am advocating some of the activities associated with their philosophies and practices.) Depending on the age of the child – and other considerations – children can engage in these experiences in a group situation or a one-on-one basis with a piano teacher.

Following on from an introduction to simple elements of music, children need to learn to read and play music on the keyboard. It is here that good habits must be stressed. It is important however that this does not detract from the enjoyment of learning. Learning to play the piano is much more than concentrating on technique! Over time, children should develop sufficient skills to enable them to enjoy a lifelong pleasure in playing the piano and teaching themselves new pieces. In other words, they should become independent learners.

Addressing faults in beginner pianists

There are many common faults made by beginner students. If mistakes are not corrected when they first occur, the same errors are repeated and can form bad habits, such as poor posture, or incorrect hand positions. Corrections can sometimes be problematic, but they must be attended to. A competent teacher will be able to spot problems and suggest solutions; this skill develops over time. With experience, teachers develop a repertoire of solutions to common mistakes. Never underestimate the benefit of demonstrating how to address a problem, as distinct from simply telling a student what to do. Not all problems can be addressed by focusing simply on the student: some are caused by ‘external’ factors such as the height of a chair. Novice teachers, further, must have an understanding of the multiplicity of tasks that students confront in their first lessons; these include playing in time, reading music notation, developing a sense of keyboard geography, followed soon after by differences in touch, an ability to read a note or two ahead, and so on. And, whilst mastering these tasks, children must be guided to listen attentively to the sounds and rhythms they are producing. Enabling children to achieve such tasks successfully entails patience, understanding and perseverance on the part of a teacher. What one child will find difficult, another will find easy! This applies to the understanding of basic musical concepts as well as particular skills. A common problem experienced by many students is ‘playing by numbers’, whereby they read the fingering which, in some books for beginning students, corresponds to the five fingers on each hand. It can be painful to discover that this ‘method’ has a limited lifespan! But this is only one of many problems confronted by students.

Although the importance of addressing faults in piano playing early has been stressed, this is sometimes interpreted by teachers as a need to focus simply on technique – to the extent that technique is stressed over musicality. Essentially, technique should be seen as everything that is necessary for someone to perform a piece of music well: it is not merely the learning of scales and arpeggios. It has to do with producing sounds of beautiful quality such that the music communicates to whoever hears it what the performer wishes. My advice for the novice teacher is never to lose sight of this. A good technique is simply a tool for playing more musically – and some technical problems are best solved within the context of a piece of music – not as stand-alone exercises. This is not to contradict the great Rachmaninoff who is reputed to have said that without technique there can be no interpretation.

Relaxation

Learning to relax is one of the most fundamental aspects of piano playing. Essentially, it has to do with playing ‘naturally’, without tightness, and avoiding superfluous movements, some of which can be injurious. It is not uncommon for pianists to experience muscle or some other physical soreness that impedes their playing. From the beginning, teachers must be alert to any stiffness or tightness or other unnatural, constraining movements in children. Commonly this can be caused by poor posture. If not corrected early, the problem can get much worse. Sometimes the problem can best be addressed by doing exercises – including breathing exercises – away from the piano. Unfortunately, it is a problem that is often neglected by teachers and one that is also neglected in training courses. Dealing with musicians’ injuries is now a field of research in itself and is not confined to pianists.

Time (pulse) and rhythm

At the most basic level, there is pulse. Rhythm is the arrangement of note values, usually according to a time signature. Whilst some students can maintain a steady pulse when clapping, others need assistance. There are many techniques: using bodily movement such as marching, clapping with the teacher so that the child can see and follow the teacher’s even hand movements, or the teacher lightly tapping the child on the shoulders so that the child can feel, kinaesthetically, the steady pulse as the teacher claps it. Of course, one can also use a metronome – but judiciously! After this the teacher can introduce the concept of an accent as in 2/4 or 4/4. As novice teachers gain experience they will devise ways themselves for introducing these concepts both away from the keyboard and on the keyboard. The introduction of short rhythmic phrases can follow.

Of course, for beginner students, trying to learn rhythm and note reading, as well as correct posture and hand positions, can be a daunting task. Keep in mind that in the early stages young children’s fingers can be weak and lack control; it is essential therefore that such activity proceeds at a comfortable or manageable speed. Teachers must proceed carefully in introducing these early activities but, at the same time, not forget that they are teaching music. From the earliest stages it is important to place all learning within a musical context.

Learning to read

Learning to read both the value of notes (crotchets/quarter notes, minims/half notes, etc.) as well as their pitch on the treble and bass staves can present problems for some students. This is made easier if children have already commenced school and learnt the

alphabet and begun to learn how to read language. The task of reading pitch from the treble – or bass – staff, is to relate the note to the keyboard. Some children have difficulty with this and play by ‘numbers’ (where fingering is provided). Novice teachers must be careful to ensure that the child is reading the actual notes. Some children, after hearing a piece played by the teacher, will play it ‘by ear’ without referring to the notes; whilst the training of the ear is imperative from the earliest stages (and should never be neglected), it is nonetheless essential that the teacher also ensures that a child is learning how to read music.

A related task is for the child to develop a sense of ‘keyboard geography’ such that it is not essential to keep looking down at the keyboard to find each successive note. This requires the development of a sense of touch or ‘feel’ so that the students know where they are on the keyboard without looking. Novice teachers should experiment themselves with fun ways of children not relying on having to look at the keyboard all of the time. This might include giving children ‘anchors’, such as D in the middle of the two black notes. It might also include teaching children to read by intervals and kinaesthetically feeling the interval without having to look at their hands. It’s important however to keep in mind that whilst developing a child’s confidence in relation to playing the notes without constantly looking at them, it should not be forced to the extent that it detracts from the enjoyment of learning the piano.

Training students to listen: developing the ear

Mention has already been made of the importance of training students to listen to the sounds they produce. This applies not only to listening to the actual pitch of the notes, but also the quality of the sound they produce. Never accept ‘ugly’ sounds. Demonstrate the same note being played in different ways: from loudly to softly, beautifully to harshly, and so on. Then ask the student to do the same. (Later on, as the child develops, this will lead to a discussion of the speed at which the note is depressed, the height from which it is attacked, and the relative weight of the hands and fingers.) Indeed, the playing of an instrument is a lifelong quest to produce beautiful – or musically appropriate – sounds. Unlike string players, for example, pianists have the notes at each pitch ‘fixed’ in front of them: they do not have to use their ears to ‘find’ the correct pitch. But they do have to use their ears to listen critically to the quality of the note they produce. A good teacher will assist a child to mentally hear the note before it is played.

As young students progress, they must learn to listen critically to their playing – not only each note and the quality and duration of it, but the note within the context of the phrase. This skill should commence in the early stages of learning the piano. As they progress – and,

with very young children, when their feet can comfortably reach the pedals – they can begin to learn the art of pedalling, all the time listening critically to the sounds and tone qualities they are producing. Too often the use of the pedal is introduced prematurely – before the child's feet can comfortably reach the pedals.

Concentration

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that learning the piano requires intense concentration. Novice teachers need to be alert to the fact that not only do many young – and older – children have very short concentration spans, but that this varies from child to child. It is essential therefore to 'break-up' the lesson and not concentrate on one aspect for too long. For the same reason, in the early stages at least, long practice periods should be avoided; it is better, for example, to practice twice a day for 10 or 15 minutes each time, than to practise for 30 minutes without a break.

Section 3: *Teacher knowledge and skills*

Background of teachers

Piano teachers' experience and background vary enormously. Whilst nothing can be done to speed-up experience, teachers can do something about their qualifications and preparation for teaching. Some teachers have a music degree with or without appropriate teacher training, some have a teaching or non-teaching music diploma awarded by an examining body such as ABRSM, others have a lesser qualification such as Grade 8, ABRSM. Whilst being appropriately qualified is no guarantee of teaching quality, it is a good starting point. Anyone who wishes to commence teaching piano should ensure that they have an appropriate music qualification as well as sufficient teacher training, including a study of child psychology and the psychology of teaching and learning. But regardless of their qualifications, all teachers still have an ongoing responsibility to engage in professional development for their entire teaching career; that is, to update or refresh their musical and pedagogical knowledge and skills. This may include attending seminars, conferences and master-classes, and undertaking further, formal study. It can be supplemented by attending concerts and other performances, reading books and journals, and listening critically to CDs. Ideally, having a mentor piano teacher is another way of gaining essential knowledge and skills. Piano teachers also have a responsibility to maintain and develop their keyboard skills and expand their repertoire.

The problem of qualifications is not made any easier by the fact that there is no system of piano teacher accreditation in Malaysia; this is a common problem world-wide. Even in countries where there are music teacher associations – as in Australia, for example – accreditation for studio teachers is not compulsory. Essentially, anyone can teach piano. This serves as a reminder to parents to beware when choosing a piano teacher.

Teacher attributes

Before commencing teaching, a novice teacher should have studied some aspects of piano pedagogy. Of course this can be an ongoing quest: but to commence without any teaching foundation is not recommended. Every new situation that the teacher encounters when working with students assists in increasing teaching skills. This however must be supplemented by ongoing, formal study of teaching pedagogy that can then be undertaken as one teaches.

Studio piano teachers work with students on a one-on-one basis, unlike, for example, classroom teachers. This involves a different relationship with the student: one that can be much more intense and nurturing, where the student has the teacher's sole, individualised attention. The teacher has a responsibility to ensure good rapport and communication with the student (and parents) and to create a stimulating learning environment – one where the student looks forward to the next lesson. Teachers therefore must consider the age level of the student – as well as other personal characteristics – when speaking to them. This involves establishing a sense of trust. One of many skills required by a good teacher is to establish two-way dialogue, and this involves the teacher asking the right questions to set the child thinking in the right direction.

The teacher's personality must be one that is conducive to good communication and teaching. However, there is not just one type of personality that is ideally suited to teaching. Just as there are different methods of teaching, so, too, are the different types of teachers, all of whom can be effective in working with students. Regardless of personality type, excellent communication skills, a deep understanding of students and ways in which they learn, patience and perseverance, and, of course, a love of music and desire to share this, are some of the essential skills. In the process, teachers should never underestimate the importance of praise and encouragement: all students need this and for most of them it is a great motivator. Having a sense of humour is also a very useful attribute for a teacher; it can release tension, 'lighten' difficult moments, and create a more relaxed atmosphere of fun – for both the student and the teacher.

Finally, it is important that teachers have at least basic computer skills; these are generally more common in younger teachers than those who are older. Computer skills not only enable piano teachers to access information on the web with ease, but also assist them to keep abreast of current developments in music and music education world-wide; this can be done quickly and cheaply. In addition, computer technology can be an excellent, supplementary tool, to assist teaching and learning – and is one of the most common and exciting avenues of learning for young children.

Business skills

When establishing an independent studio, teachers should have some understanding of business, financial, and organisational skills. Among others, they need to engage in advertising for students, and develop a system for collecting fees (and dealing with parents who do not pay on time). Ideally, they could write a 'policy' booklet that sets out their

expectations simply and clearly for both parents and students. There are short, easy-to-read books written for people establishing a small business such as a teaching studio (in many countries there are short courses run by various institutions).

Section 4: *Practice, Sight-reading, Musicianship skills, Group teaching*

Practice

No-one would argue against the importance of practice. Unfortunately, many students are not taught how to practise effectively; some mistakenly believe that the time spent practising is in proportion to improvement. This is not necessarily so: ‘practice time’ does not necessarily equate to ‘quality of practice’. It is not uncommon for students to waste a lot of time when practising instead of focusing on specific problems. This is quite different from merely playing a piece through three or four times: ‘aimless’ repetition of itself does not generally lead to improvement. An achievable aim or goal should be set for every practice session. Students also need to understand when to practise hands separately, and when hands together; when to play slowly and how to increase the tempo; when to introduce dynamics, and so on.

Teacher must guide students on effective practice from the very first lesson. From then on they must always ensure that children know how to practise effectively for the following week. Unfortunately, teaching students how to practise is an area of piano tuition that is often neglected or at least taught poorly. Mistakes repeated at each successive practice session can become difficult to correct; for this reason students need to learn, from the beginning, to critically monitor everything they do.

Training the ear to listen should commence at the first piano lesson – and students must be taught how to continue listening sensitively and purposively every time they practise. They need to know from the start that practise is more than playing notes: every practice session is an ear training session.

Ideally, children should be willing to practise; forcing them is less effective. This, of course, is an area that can cause problems. Teachers should do everything they can to ensure that a child will be motivated to practise between lessons. In addition to setting very small, achievable goals for each practice session, it may be necessary to ensure that the parent sits with the child and provides judicious encouragement, assistance and praise for even small achievements.

Practice requires intense concentration. For young children and beginners ‘short’ practice sessions are much better than one long session. Ideally, children should not practise when they are tired or distracted by other things. Of course, the concentration or attention span of children varies tremendously. When it begins to wane, or if a child is experiencing extreme

difficulty with a piece or some other task, it is wise to move on to something else – or have a complete break and return to practising a little later.

Teachers, students and parents need to understand that not only do we all learn at different rates, but that the learning process contains ‘plateaus’ where progress slows down for a period of time; this is normal. When this occurs, the role of the teacher (and parent) is to be extremely supportive to ensure that a student does not become completely disillusioned. As students progress and become more confident, they should be encouraged to explore effective ways of practising that best suit them. The more joy and the stronger the sense of achievement that they derive from practising, the greater will be their motivation.

Finally, teachers, students and parents need to realize that inefficient practice does not necessarily make perfect! But careful, focused and intelligent practice, where time is not wasted, can help greatly.

Sight-reading

The skill of sight-reading is something that everyone learning the piano should develop. Most students experience problems with sight-reading, often because the teaching of the skill has been neglected or not properly taught by the teacher. Sadly, sight-reading is often left to a few weeks before an examination. It requires ongoing teaching and regular – even daily – practise. Teachers should never lose sight of the fact that sight-reading – as with all piano playing – should involve not only the eyes and the hands, but also the ears!

The development of sight-reading skills should begin in the early stages of learning the piano. Good sight-reading entails a number of skills, including an ability to maintain a steady pulse and tempo, memorising or reading ahead of where one is playing, focusing on two clefs at the same time, and having a good sense of keyboard geography so that one can read the music without looking at the keyboard.

There are of course a few basic tasks that students must observe before sight-reading a piece. In addition to studying the time-signature and key signature, they should observe the expressive markings and ‘map out’ the piece in general, noting any accidentals or ‘difficult’ leger lines, then memorising the first few notes before commencing.

Sight-reading depends on being able to recognize intervals, patterns (rhythmic, melodic and harmonic), and repetitions. Of course, tempo and rhythm are vital – even if it occasionally means leaving out a few notes. Teachers must not forget that good sight-reading also involves paying attention to dynamic markings.

Beginner students often commence sight-reading one clef at a time; but they should quickly progress to reading two clefs simultaneously. Later on they will learn to quickly recognize not only the melodic progression of notes, but also chords and their inversions, reading vertically from the bottom upwards. Knowing standard fingerings for scales, arpeggios and the like can also be of great assistance when sight-reading.

In encouraging sight-reading it is useful to give students pieces that are of a lower standard, and gradually increase the level of difficulty as their confidence develops. Engaging them in the playing of duets and even playing simple accompaniments can be enjoyable and instructive activities for developing this skill. Some method books come with digital recordings that enable students to play along with another instrument.

With regular practise and training, students can become acquainted with a wide range of repertoire – including contemporary pieces that use uncommon notations – without relying completely on the teacher. Where appropriate, the teacher can subsequently ‘refine’ works that a student has to sight-read. Students with good sight-reading skills find it easier to revisit works that they have not played for some time. To be able to read music at sight with ease is an extremely useful skill.

Musicianship Skills

Essentially, musicianship has to do with everything that a student needs to learn to become a competent pianist. It is concerned with ear training, music reading, music theory, composition, harmonisation, improvisation, transposition, ensemble playing, memorisation, sight-reading, and music history. It entails a keyboard and interpretive technique, creativity, and artistry. A key to the development of musicianship is listening, which should commence at the very first lesson. Every piano lesson should be a listening lesson – an ear training lesson; singing can assist greatly in this. From the start, even beginner pianists must listen carefully to every sound they produce on the keyboard.

The development of a rhythmic sense is essential for all musicians. Unfortunately, some students do not have a good rhythmic sense which, at its most basic, involves being able to maintain a steady pulse at various speeds or tempi. This leads into simple rhythmic activities. All of this can be approached initially away from the keyboard through clapping and simple movement activities.

Whilst opinions differ as to when children should begin reading music – with most experts believing this should be sooner rather than later – they must learn to do this at some stage. Ultimately, this helps to give them easy and unrestricted access to the body of notated

music. Initially, children need to develop fluency in reading rhythmic and staff notation. Astute teachers ensure that they then quickly learn how to recognise melodic intervals and patterns in both clefs. This should lead to them taking in more than one note at a time as they read both horizontally and vertically. Development of a sense of keyboard geography leads to further improvement of these skills.

Memorisation is an important skill – not simply to be able to play a work without the music but, as a learning tool, to be able to recall and repeat small patterns and phrases. In this sense it is related to ear training. That is, the emphasis is placed first and foremost on hearing the music and remembering it, rather than ‘by-passing’ the ears and relying on a recollection of the visual notation or image of the score. But, of course, visual memory also has a role to play: as all good sight-readers know. The weakest of the memories is tactile or kinaesthetic memory where the body remembers the physical movements and fingerings. A teacher must be alert to students who, when playing from memory, rely completely on kinaesthetic memory; this is the memory that accounts for most memory loss situations when a young person plays for others. Skilled pianists rely most on their aural memory, together with a visual and analytic memory that allows them to follow the structural elements – melody, harmony, phrasing, and ‘framework’ – of a piece.

Although not generally taught by ‘traditional’ piano teachers, learning how to improvise can greatly assist a student’s musical development. It is an excellent way of training the ear and developing a harmonic sense. When well taught, students enjoy the freedom of experimenting melodically, harmonically and rhythmically on the keyboard. But this requires a teacher who knows how to ‘structure’ the improvisational activities so that the student is growing musically. At the beginning it might be a simple task of a student improvising a melody over an ostinato bass – all on the black keys of the piano. This can lead to providing a melody over a predetermined harmonic pattern, starting with just one chord and moving on to two and more. Students should be encouraged to spend some of their practice time on improvisational exercises. Like jazz musicians, students who engage in improvisational activities are learning how to make musical judgments for themselves ‘on the spot’.

I encourage teachers who feel that they do not have the skills to do this to enrol in a workshop on basic keyboard improvisational techniques. They should also search for available DVDs and books that assist in the development of improvisation.

In addition to being introduced to improvisation, students will benefit from keyboard harmony. This develops their harmonic sense and, of course, can complement the

improvisational activities that they engage in. Unfortunately, harmony is often taught as ‘theory’ with little if any reference to playing on the keyboard what is written on the page. Keyboard harmony develops a student’s ear. This can begin with elementary exercises, beginning perhaps by playing only the bass notes, followed by the playing of simple chords, beginning with I, IV and V, then progressing to V7 and diminished chords as well as inversions. As they progress they can learn to play such exercises in various keys. In the early stages this might include playing basic cadences and accompaniments. As with improvisation, it should be practiced regularly and reinforced at lessons.

Another element of musicianship is transposition. Like improvisation and keyboard harmony, it is often neglected when teaching the piano. It too is an excellent way of further developing the ear. It also reinforces a sense of harmony.

There are other aspects of musicianship that novice teachers should not neglect. These include music history, ensemble playing, and sight-reading (discussed above). Where appropriate the pieces that students learn should be put into an historical context so that gradually they develop a ‘feeling’ for different styles and genres: the Baroque compared to the Romantic periods, for example. As they progress, they can be directed to relevant, supplemental material to study.

Ensemble activities can, not only be a source of pleasure for students, but also educational in that they develop their skills in being part of a group, having to ‘adjust’ their playing to fit-in to the playing of others. This activity can begin with simple duet playing with the teacher or another student where this is possible. As well as being yet another excellent means of developing their ear, ensemble activities can also contribute to improvement in sight-reading. Appropriately, such activities are often undertaken in group classes.

Group Teaching

Some aspects of learning the piano lend themselves better to group teaching and learning than others. Whilst learning to play the instrument itself is normally better done on a one-on-one basis, there are other activities that can work well in a group teaching situation. But it depends on the teacher and the student. For example, rhythmic and aural activities – including singing – as well as the playing of musical games, generally work well in groups. So too do ensemble activities and small performances. These can assist in giving students confidence; they can also provide a support environment for them receiving and giving criticism of their own and others’ playing. When such activities are well handled, the opportunity of learning and interacting with others can be conducive to rich and enjoyable

experiences. A sense of support and camaraderie is often a feature of group lessons, with students energizing each other. Generally, group activities are best thought of as a 'supplement' to a one-on-one piano lesson. Of course, not all teachers are involved with group lessons. Where they are, the frequency of them varies from teacher to teacher; some prefer to have a group lesson once a month – others more frequently and still others less so.

Of course, teachers need other skills to work in a group situation. These include the ability to 'control' the group and ensure that activities are carefully planned and that students can move effortlessly from one to the next. It is imperative that all members of the group are fully engaged throughout the lesson; a competent teacher will use varied activities in an effort to achieve this. A challenge for the teacher is that of sustaining student interest and attention.

For group classes to be effective it is essential that the groups are chosen carefully; for example, children should be at a similar level in their learning, and of a similar age. Ideally, the teacher should also consider children's personality attributes when forming a group. This must be monitored at all times to ensure, for example, that one or a few children do not dominate the group. Groups tend to work more effectively when they are only 3 to 5 in number.

Finally, not only do group lessons offer an economy of time in teaching certain things, but they can assist in counteracting a feeling of being alone that is particularly common among pianists.

Section 5: *Music examinations*

Music examinations such as those conducted by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) and others are not common in all countries. For example sending students for examinations is not generally associated with learning the piano in the USA, or in European and Scandinavian countries. Generally, exams are common in countries that are – or were – part of the British Commonwealth. Certainly, music examinations are endemic in countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia and, of course, the United Kingdom; so much so that the majority of piano teachers cannot conceive of teaching the piano without presenting their students for examinations. Indeed, many teachers – and parents – are surprised to learn that examinations are not associated with learning the piano in most countries.

In Malaysia the examination system is strongly supported by teachers and parents. It is generally an expectation on the part of the teacher and the parents that the child will follow the examination route. The major examination bodies are all based in the United Kingdom: ABRSM, Guildhall Trinity, and London College of Music. The practical syllabus for grade music examinations (up to Grade 8) entails playing selected pieces (normally three) representing different periods of the repertoire, technical work (scales, arpeggios, and so on), ear tests, sight-reading, and a *viva voce* component relating to the pieces presented. Students can also sit for corresponding music theory examinations; indeed, these are normally a pre-requisite for the higher levels. The examinations are conducted in a range of instruments. There are also other examinations possibilities, including musicianship, a jazz syllabus, and duet and ensemble syllabi.

Novice teachers are strongly advised to make certain that they are very familiar with whatever examination syllabus they follow and that they do not neglect to prepare a student for something that is required in an examination. They must always be acquainted with the current syllabus. There are too many stories of a student playing a piece that is not on the syllabus, preparing technical work wrongly, and so on.

A competent teacher will make certain that the pieces chosen for examination are appropriate to the particular skills and needs of the student; in other words, they must have an educational purpose as well as a musical one. Examination students, further, must have an appropriate musical foundation in performance and musicianship before beginning to work on an examination syllabus; some teachers begin preparing students for examinations too early. Once the preparation begins the teacher must ensure that the student has adequate time to learn

each piece; indeed, all aspects of the examination must be adequately prepared – nothing must be left to chance. This can be problematic, especially when a teacher is inexperienced and not strongly familiar with the standard required by a particular examining board. Of course, this will develop over time, and presenting students for an examination can be a useful learning tool for the teacher. This, of course, only underscores the importance of every novice teacher having adequate training before they commence teaching.

Prior to an examination, novice teachers are encouraged to enlist the assistance of a more experienced teacher – or mentor – in listening to their students' work and offering advice on examination 'technique', such as listening carefully to what the examiner asks with respect to the playing of scales and arpeggios, and the importance of mentally thinking for a few seconds about a piece before playing it. Many students, further, are not properly taught how to approach sight-reading in an examination, with some commencing to play before they have carefully looked through the piece; others fail to understand that when sight-reading they must play rhythmically, maintaining a steady beat or pulse, and not stop for corrections; some even neglect to consider the time signature. Unfortunately, like aural training and ear tests, teachers often neglect sight-reading until a few weeks before an examination. The same problem often occurs with the *viva voce* component, with students being expected to 'cram' the information about their pieces just a few weeks prior to the examination. These two areas should be a normal aspect of every lesson. An experienced teacher can also be enlisted to give students a 'mock exam', in order to gain some experience of playing under examination conditions. Small student recitals and playing for family and friends can provide other means of the student gaining confidence and overcoming nerves, and the teacher becoming aware of things that still need to be addressed.

Novice teachers must guard against a sense of boredom or monotony on the part of a student who is concentrating on just three pieces for several months. To this end, it is advisable that the student also plays other pieces. Making certain that the student is playing the examination pieces at his or her peak at the time of an examination is a skill that comes with experience. The teacher needs to guard against a student presenting pieces that are not yet ready for performance on the one hand, and 'peaking' too early on the other. There is some merit in students sitting for an examination that is one grade lower than the level at which they are playing. This not only maximizes their chances of achieving a high score, but also means that, concurrently, they will be able to learn other, more advanced pieces, at a relatively leisurely pace.

Teachers should use examination results and the accompanying examiner's report, constructively. Competent examiners write reports that are diagnostic and can be used to instruct both the teacher and the student. The written comments can be a valuable source of feedback and encouragement for both of them. Too often, the focus of teachers, students and parents is the grade or mark only. Of course, not all examiners are as encouraging or thorough as they might be; any disparaging comments made of the student must be sensitively handled by the teacher. Because of the nature of music, any assessment will have a subjective element to it: it is impossible to assess a performance simply in objective terms. Even music critics will disagree on the same performance or playing on a CD by a pianist.

Although the issues of practice was discussed in a previous section, it is worth stressing again here the importance of the novice teacher making sure that students know what is expected of them when practising at home. The role of parents should also be discussed.

Of course, many students also sit for music theory examinations (which are a pre-requisite for some grades). Ideally, the work learnt for theory should be related to the pieces and technical work that students are learning on the piano. Unfortunately, theory is sometimes taught without reference to the keyboard and not in conjunction with the development of aural skills. When well taught, music theory will enrich a student's understanding of the music they are playing and, ideally, lead to a better performance. There are numerous books available on the teaching of theory, some published by the examination boards who also publish past theory papers for students to study.

The following discussion looks at both sides of the argument with respect to possible advantages and disadvantages of music examinations. In reflecting on these arguments, novice teachers will be in a better position to consider for themselves the merits or otherwise of such a system. If nothing else, it might assist them in the way they approach examinations, and this in turn might enrich their understanding and teaching.

When properly handled, music examinations have the potential for challenging students; they provide a goal for achievement. They can be a source of motivation and a reward for work well done – especially if the student achieves a high score. On the other hand, teachers should not fall into the trap of thinking that examinations are the main – or even the best – source of motivation for learning; some students are 'intrinsically' motivated and have a sense of achievement without needing to resort to an external assessment.

It is sometimes argued that the certificate a successful student receives upon passing an examination is yet another incentive for continuing. But there are others who would suggest that many students do not need this incentive: they have an intrinsic sense of joy and

satisfaction of knowing that they have done well without needing a certificate to confirm it. Further, there is no evidence that the sense of joy in learning the piano is any greater if students sit for examinations.

Examinations can be used to demonstrate a certain standard of performance and to provide evidence of progress. On the other hand, this can be achieved in other ways including, in part, small recitals.

Examinations it is said, demonstrate achievement beyond keyboard playing, given that they incorporate elements such as sight-reading, aural tests, and general knowledge. However, students do not necessarily have to sit for an examination to demonstrate these other skills.

The examination system provides teachers with a regulated syllabus that has been developed by leaders in their field. But teachers can also develop their own syllabus, and structure a course of study that is carefully based on each student, keeping in mind the importance of giving them a wide range of music to play; the teacher can even provide alternative means of assessing a student's progress. At the same time, teachers can use elements from any syllabus they like, bearing in mind that there may be works not contained in a syllabus that have merit, even if only because a student particularly wants to learn it.

Some people argue that examinations not only provide an assurance that the child is progressing well, but that the teacher is teaching well. Never lose sight of the fact however that there are also other ways of assessing good teaching.

It is argued that a music examination provides international benchmarks for gauging a student's success. It needs to be remembered however that in most countries of the world students do not sit for such examinations, and there is no evidence that this has led to fewer pianists being produced. Further, keep in mind that no-one has developed any international benchmarks for assessing a student's joy in learning.

Of course, there are other issues that could be raised. The reason for raising these and attempting to present two sides of the argument is primarily to cause novice teachers to think for themselves about the role and value of music examinations rather than blindly continuing with a system because it is the one that they have been inducted into, without giving it any further thought. Many similar arguments could be made for and against music competitions; as with music examinations, if a novice teacher decides to enter students for competitions, he or she should be clear about the benefits of them as well as any pitfalls.

In conclusion, novice teachers must decide where they stand with regard to music examinations. Some will eagerly want to present students for examinations, some will be selective in the students they present, and yet others may decide not to follow the examination

route. Regardless, all will need to make certain that they do everything they can to provide a comprehensive program tailored for each student who must be motivated by more than the mere passing of examinations. Teachers must never lose sight of the fact that they are teaching music – and there are many different routes that can be followed. Underscoring them all must be a belief in the importance of developing a student's musical skills and knowledge, and opening-up the wide world of music to them so that it can become a source of enjoyment throughout life, regardless of whether, in later years, they continue to play the piano. Music examinations, like music competitions, are neither good nor bad: it is the approach of the teacher that makes them a positive force for learning or one that has little musical or educational merit.

Afterword

Music, like all art forms, is continually evolving. All of the great composers have moved on from their predecessors, with many of them pushing the boundaries of composition as much as they could. The situation is no different today. As a result of the technological revolution, the world of music today offers possibilities that were not imagined even 50 years ago. During the past century recording techniques have improved dramatically: the wind-up phonograph with its music cylinders of 100 years ago has been replaced by 78 records, 45 records, 33 records, tapes, cassettes, and now CDs, DVDs and YouTube, where we not only hear an artist perform but also see them in recital. This has been accompanied by a greatly increased accessibility and affordability of recordings that can be played on 'regular' equipment in the home or on iPods that provide easy portability. Further, we are now able to download music directly onto our computers. Today music can accompany us wherever we go. Music has never been more accessible.

But it is more than this: for many years composers have been able to use electronic means of composing using their computers. It is now possible to reproduce the sound of any instrument electronically. Today, any child with a computer can compose music and record it easily – and present it to others. This of course does not negate the need for music teachers: if anything, it makes their role even more important if we are to develop children's creative and aesthetic qualities to their full potential. Similarly, easy access to music recordings and music-making does not negate the need for live music; no-one can reproduce the experience, the atmosphere, of being in a concert hall, listening to a live recital. Music teachers, I believe, have a responsibility to ensure that their students experience as many live recitals as possible – and not only performances by pianists.

New technologies offer some exciting possibilities for piano teachers not only because students can download on YouTube performances by many pianists of pieces they are learning, but also because of the teaching programs that are now available. These programs can assist students in music theory and in developing musicianship skills in general. But having said this, no program has yet been developed that dispenses with the need for excellent piano teachers. We tend to speak of gifted composers and gifted pianists: we should not lose sight of the fact that many of these are the result of gifted teachers. To novice teachers I offer the following wish: that you yourself will be a gifted teacher. It can be one of the most rewarding pursuits in life. And keep in mind that your primary goal is to induct students into the world of music such that it will be a lifelong pursuit for them. Underscoring all of this is

the need for piano lessons to be enjoyable. If, along the way, you develop students who go on to have a career in music, this is just a bonus! Ultimately, “It’s not what the child does for music, but *what music does for the child.*”*

Best wishes for a successful teaching career.

*Wesley Schaum and Joan Cupp (1987). *Keyboard Teaching with Greater Success and Satisfaction*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Schaum Publications, Inc. (page 15).

Recommended books for novice teachers

Abeles, H. F., Hoffer, C. R., & Klotman, R. H. (1984). *Foundations of music education*. New York: Schirmer Books.

Agay, D. (Ed.). (2004). *The art of teaching piano*. (2nd Ed.) New York: Yorktown Music Press.

Ahrens, C. B. & Atkinson, G. D. (1966). *For all piano teachers*. London: Lowe and Brydone.

Bakar-Jordan, M. (2004). *Practical piano pedagogy*. Florida: Warner Bros. Publications

Bastein, J. W. (1995). *How to teach piano successfully*. (3rd Ed.) California: General Words and Music Company.

Bolton, H. (1953). *On teaching the piano*. London: Novello and Co. Ltd.

Bolton, H. (1957). *How to practice*. London: Elkin & Co.

Booth, V. (1971). *We piano teachers*. (8th Ed.) London: Hutchinson of London.

Bruxner, M. (1972). *Mastering the piano*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Coats, S. (2006). *Thinking as you play*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Cooke, C. (1948). *Playing the piano for pleasure*. London: The Falcon Press Limited.

Deutsch, L. (1959). *Piano: guided sight-reading*. (2nd Ed.) Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

Folders, A. (1964). *Keys to the keyboard*. (4th Ed.) London: Oxford University Press.

Giesecking, W. & Leimer, K. (1922). *Piano technique*. New York: Dover Publications.

- Harris, P., & Crozier, P. (2000). *The music teacher's companion*. London: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (Publishing) Limited.
- Jacobson, J. M. (2006). *Professional piano teaching*. Los Angeles: Alfred Publishing Co.
- Klingenstein, B. G. (2009). *The independent piano teacher's studio handbook*. Milwaukee, USA: Hal Leonard Corporation.
- Lang, B. F. (1998). *A piano teacher's words of wisdom*. North Carolina, U.S.A.: Pentland Press.
- Langley, E. (1963) *Principles of teaching as applied to music*. London: Lowe & Brydone Ltd.
- Last, J. (1966). *The young pianist*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Lovelock, W. (1965). *Common sense in music teaching*. London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd.
- Lyke, J. & Enoch, Y. (Eds). (1987). *Creative music teaching*. (2nd Ed.) Illinois, USA: Stipes Publishing.
- Moss, E. (1989). *More than teaching*. Toronto: Gordon V. Thompson Music.
- Newman, W. S. (1984). *The pianist's problems*. (4th Ed.) New York: Da Capo Press.
- Reeves, B. (1955). *Approach to piano teaching*. London: Bosworth & Co. Ltd.
- Schaum, W., & Cupp, J. (1987). *Keyboard teaching with greater success and satisfaction*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, U.S.A.: Schaum Publications.
- Tankard, G. (1966). *Piano Diplomas*. London: Elkin & Co. Ltd.
- Varro, M. (1997). *Dynamic piano teaching*. London: N. Simrock.
- Waterman, F. (1983). *On piano teaching and performing*. London: Faber Music Ltd.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was twofold: (1) to map the current situation regarding piano teaching in Malaysia and, on the basis of this and a study of relevant literature on piano teaching as well as the researcher's own experience, (2) to develop a book of advice for beginner or novice piano teachers. From the administration of a questionnaire to 59 piano teachers in Kuala Lumpur, as well as in-depth interviews with a further ten teachers, the researcher gained a comprehensive view of pertinent issues relating to piano teaching – ones that informed the writing of the Book and give it a particularly Malaysian perspective. Whilst written specifically for novice teachers, the Book might also be of interest to others and, hopefully, have relevance for teachers in other countries, particularly in Asia. Of course, had the Book been written for more experienced teachers there would have been different emphases, and some topics would have been discussed in more detail – and some less. Certainly, it opens the way for a Book, again focused on Malaysian teachers, that is directed to more experienced teachers.

A number of recommendations emerge from the study:

1. The Book could be further developed to assist more experienced teachers.
2. A future study might investigate teaching practices from first-hand observation of student lessons. This study has not examined the *quality* of teaching given by piano teachers with respect to actual practice: it has instead looked at what teachers report that they do. It might be asked, 'Is there a discrepancy between a teacher's beliefs and their actual practice?' A future study therefore could examine teacher behaviour within a piano lesson as a means of ascertaining the *quality* of the teaching. Whilst this would not be easy to undertake – not least because of the problem of finding teachers who would be willing to be observed – it could have great benefits.
3. As practice is one of the keys to learning an instrument, ascertaining the quality of a student's practice (as distinct from mere frequency) could be the subject of future research. To a large extent it could be argued that a prime consideration in investigating practice is student 'motivation'.

4. It would be interesting to investigate why only three-quarters of the 59 piano teachers who responded to the survey considered an ability to perform musically to be an important skill for beginner and elementary students. Why did a quarter (15 teachers) not consider this important? Similarly, why is it that less than a third of the respondents (17 or 28.8%) considered aural perception of importance? Responses such as these warrant further probing.
5. There may be some merit in mapping the registration or certification requirements that are made of private piano teachers in countries world-wide. Such a study could be used to advocate for tighter controls on private teachers in Malaysia to ensure that they meet minimum standards and keep abreast of developments in their profession.
6. An interesting study into the effectiveness of a piano lesson could be undertaken by observing a group of teachers with their students and use a checklist based on that used in the questionnaire for identifying aspects of a good lesson. Of course, other items could also be added.
7. Many of the ideas discussed in the sections of the Book that has been produced as part of this project have relevance for the learning of other instruments; indeed, the Book could be adapted for this purpose. For example, it could be adapted for the learning of strings, wind, and brass instruments.
8. There is no association for music teachers in Kuala Lumpur or Malaysia along the lines, for example, of the Victorian Music Teachers' Association in Victoria and similar bodies in other Australian states. This is to be regretted. It is therefore recommended that interested teachers consider establishing such an organisation.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Ethics approval letter



Design and Social Context

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Building 220, Level 4
Bundoora Campus
PO Box 71
Bundoora 3083
Victoria
Australia
Tel: +61 3 9925 7480
Fax: +61 3 9925 7586

6 March 2008

Dear Participant,

My name is Siew Yong Cheah. I am undertaking a Master of Education degree in the School of Education at RMIT University.

The title of my research is: An investigation into the knowledge and skills that new piano teachers need to teach, a quality music program successfully in Malaysia. The aim of my research is to produce a text to guide novice and less experienced piano teachers in Malaysia.

I will be sending out 60 survey questionnaires to piano teachers of at least two years teaching experience and interview 10 piano teachers with five or more years of teaching experience.

Names are kept confidential and the recordings of interviews will be securely kept in the researcher's study with the procedure of RMIT University. I will be asking you about your teaching methods and approaches, the way you address areas of weakness in students, and the skills and knowledge you consider important in teaching music.

I need your cooperation to carry out this research and I thank you in advance for your participation in this survey/interview. Without your assistance I will not be able to conduct this research. I sincerely thank you for your willingness to help.

This project would be completed by 2010 and the outcome of a text for novice piano teacher would be established. It should benefit new graduate piano teachers and those with experience in teaching of piano. Please be informed that results in the study may appear in publications.

Privacy and Disclosure of Information will be kept confidential and in accordance to the regulations and procedures set by University of RMIT. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied. Further information including contact names and numbers for any questions/problems can be withdrawn if necessary in the case of interviews.

This research is not funded by any particular organization. My supervisor's name is Dr. David Forrest and he can be contacted on (03) 9925 4920 or david.forrest@rmit.edu.au

Yours sincerely,

Siew Yong Cheah L.R.S.M., A.R.C.M.

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Executive Officer, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, Research & Innovation, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. Details of the complaints procedure are available at: http://www.rmit.edu.au/rd/hrec_complaints

APPENDIX 2: Letters to the two groups of respondents and the Consent Form

1. Questionnaire consent form
2. Interviewee's consent form

1. Questionnaire consent form

RMIT HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE		Appendix 1 Questionnaires
Prescribed Consent Form For Persons Participating In Research Projects Involving Interviews, Questionnaires, Focus Groups or Disclosure of Personal Information		
PORTFOLIO OF SCHOOL/CENTRE OF	<u>Design and Social Context</u>	
Name of participant:	<u>Education</u>	
Project Title:	<u>An investigation into the skills and knowledge that new piano teachers need to teach a quality music program successfully in Malaysia</u>	
Name(s) of investigators:	<u>Siew Yong Cheah</u>	
(1)	Phone:	<u>012 209 6368</u>
(2)	Phone:	<u>03 6201 1867</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I have received a statement explaining the questionnaire involved in this project. 2. I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which - including details of the interviews or questionnaires - have been explained to me. 3. I authorise the investigator or his or her assistant to interview me or administer a questionnaire. 4. I give my permission to be audio taped/photographed <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (delete if inapplicable) 5. I give my permission for my name or identity to be used <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No 6. I acknowledge that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Having read the Plain Language Statement, I agree to the general purpose, methods and demands of the study. b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied. c) The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching. It may not be of direct benefit to me. The privacy of the information I provide will be safeguarded. The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law. If I participate in a focus group I understand that whilst all participants will be asked to keep the conversation confidential, the researcher cannot guarantee that other participants will do this. d) The security of the research data is assured during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published, and a written report of the project outcomes will be provided to participants by the researcher at the end of the project. Any information which may be used to identify me will not be used unless I have given my permission (see point 5). 		
Participant's Consent		
Name:	_____	
	(Participant)	
Date:	_____	
Name:	_____	
	(Witness to signature)	
Date:	_____	
Where participant is under 18 years of age:		
I consent to the participation of _____ in the above project.		
Signature:	(1) _____	(2) _____
	(Signatures of parents or guardians)	
Date:	_____	
Name:	_____	
	(Witness to signature)	
Date:	_____	
<p><i>Participants should be given a photocopy of this consent form after it has been signed.</i></p> <p>Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Executive Officer, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, Research & Innovation, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. Details of the complaints procedure are available at: http://www.rmit.edu.au/rd/hrec_complaints</p>		

Interviewee's consent form

Appendix 1 Interviews

RMIT HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Prescribed Consent Form For Persons Participating In Research Projects Involving Interviews, Questionnaires, Focus Groups or Disclosure of Personal Information

PORTFOLIO OF SCHOOL/CENTRE OF Design and Social Context
Name of participant: Education
Project Title: An investigation into the skills and knowledge that new piano teachers need to teach a quality music program successfully in Malaysia

Name(s) of investigators: Siew Yong Cheah Phone: 012 209-6368
(1) (2) Phone: 03 6201 1867

1. I have received a statement explaining the interview involved in this project.
2. I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which - including details of the interviews or questionnaires - have been explained to me.
3. I authorise the investigator or his or her assistant to interview me or administer a questionnaire.
4. I give my permission to be audio taped/photographed ☐ Yes ☐ No (delete if inapplicable)
5. I give my permission for my name or identity to be used ☐ Yes ☐ No
6. I acknowledge that:
 - a. Having read the Plain Language Statement, I agree to the general purpose, methods and demands of the study.
 - b. I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
 - c. The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching. It may not be of direct benefit to me. The privacy of the information I provide will be safeguarded. The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law. If I participate in a focus group I understand that whilst all participants will be asked to keep the conversation confidential, the researcher cannot guarantee that other participants will do this.
 - d. The security of the research data is assured during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published, and a written report of the project outcomes will be provided to participants by the researcher at the end of the project. Any information which may be used to identify me will not be used unless I have given my permission (see point 5).

Participant's Consent

Name: * (Participant) **Date:** _____
Name: * (Witness to signature) **Date:** _____

Where participant is under 18 years of age:

I consent to the participation of _____ in the above project.
Signature: (1) (2) **Date:** _____
(Signatures of parents or guardians)
Name: _____ **Date:** _____
(Witness to signature)

Participants should be given a photocopy of this consent form after it has been signed.

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Executive Officer, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, Research & Innovation, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. Details of the complaints procedure are available at: http://www.rmit.edu.au/rd/hrec_complaints

APPENDIX 3: Survey questionnaire

Questionnaire

Please read the questions, and tick the most appropriate answer/s for each question. Thank you for your time.

Q. 1 What is your present age?

- ☐ A. 20 to – 25
- ☐ B. 26 – 30
- ☐ C. 31 – 40
- ☐ D. 41 – 50
- ☐ E. 51 years and over

Q. 2 Approximately how many years have you been teaching the piano?

Number of years:

Q. 3 Do you possess a piano teaching certificate?

- ☐ A. Diploma from an examination board/college.
- ☐ B. Degree from a university (state discipline).
- ☐ C. Other piano teaching qualification.
- ☐ D. None

Q. 4 Approximately how many students are you currently teaching?

Number of students

Q. 5 Which area/s of your teaching would you like to improve?

- ☐ A. Introduce group teaching for ear training and creative work.
- ☐ B. Structure programs to enhance individual potential.
- ☐ C. Encourage students to learn a wider repertoire.
- ☐ D. Emphasise sight-reading program.
- ☐ E. Other

Q. 6 Of the following, what are the three most important goals that you would like to set for your beginner and elementary students?

- ☐ A. Instil a love of playing the piano.
- ☐ B. Ability to perform well.
- ☐ C. Sight-read well.
- ☐ D. Enrich listening skills.
- ☐ E. Develop memory.
- ☐ F. Improvisation and composition through creativity.
- ☐ G. Other

Q. 7 What do you consider to be the basic foundation for a beginner? Tick the suitable answer/s.

- ☐ A. Training in listening skills.
- ☐ B. Technical exercises to develop finger-work.
- ☐ C. Good reading skills, with eyes focused on the music.
- ☐ D. Good sense of rhythm.
- ☐ E. Good musical concepts.
- ☐ F. Other

Q. 8 Tick the common problem/s you come across when teaching beginners?

- ☐ A. Fingers are not properly curved.
- ☐ B. Difficulty sustaining an even tempo.
- ☐ C. Bad posture.
- ☐ D. Rests not observed.
- ☐ E. Not keeping eyes on music.
- ☐ F. Playing too fast.
- ☐ G. Dependent on letter-names or marked fingerings.
- ☐ H. Other

Q. 9 Where do you acquire knowledge and skills for teaching beginner and elementary piano students? Tick relevant answer/s.

- ☐ A. Read instructional books.
- ☐ B. Apply relevant methods taught to me.
- ☐ C. Attend seminars, conferences, and workshops.
- ☐ D. Attend classes on how to teach.
- ☐ E. Other

Q. 10 What do you teach in your present teaching program?

- ☐ A. Scales and technique
- ☐ B. Pieces from different periods
- ☐ C. Sight-reading
- ☐ D. Aural training
- ☐ E. Theory of music
- ☐ F. Simple improvisation
- ☐ G. Keyboard transposition
- ☐ H. Composing on the piano
- ☐ I. Duet playing
- ☐ J. Popular and film music
- ☐ K. Jazz
- ☐ L. Other

Q. 11 From the following list please RANK THE TOP 3 most difficult teaching areas in your program. (Score 1 as the most difficult, 2 as the second most difficult and 3 as the third most difficult).

- ☐ A. Scales, studies, and technique.

- ☐ B. Expression and interpretation.
- ☐ C. Sight-reading
- ☐ D. Aural training and listening skills.
- ☐ E. Musicianship and keyboard skills.
- ☐ F. Rhythm patterns.
- ☐ G. Theory of music.
- ☐ H. Other

Q. 12 Indicate in the boxes one area of piano learning that your students most dislike (D) and one that they most like (L).

- ☐ A. Listening skills and aural training.
- ☐ B. Practising
- ☐ C. Sight-reading
- ☐ D. Studies and technique.
- ☐ E. Theory of music.
- ☐ F. Other

Q. 13 How do you encourage your beginner and elementary students to practise? Tick one (1) most important answer only.

- ☐ A. Explain and demonstrate how to 'practise'.
- ☐ B. Set achievable goals.
- ☐ C. Ask for parental supervision.
- ☐ D. Reward
- ☐ E. Other

Q. 14 Why do you think that 'practice' is so vital in music playing?

- ☐ A. Speeds up the learning process.
- ☐ B. Makes student more efficient in reading and learning music.
- ☐ C. Improves overall performance.
- ☐ D. Lessons are more interesting for both teacher and student.
- ☐ E. Other

Q. 15 Tick three (3) advantages and two (2) disadvantages of group lessons.

Q. 15 a Advantages

- ☐ A. Provide performance opportunities in front of others.
- ☐ B. Develop listening skills by listening to others.
- ☐ C. A variety of music is heard.
- ☐ D. Learning through others' good points and mistakes.
- ☐ E. Enjoyment through games and drills.
- ☐ F. Inspire students to do better.

Q. 15b Disadvantages

- ☐ A. Students who cannot keep up with the lessons may be left out.
- ☐ B. Students get relatively little individual attention.
- ☐ C. Difficult to reschedule if students do not turn up.
- ☐ D. Need to have enough students of the same age group.

☐ E. Other

Q. 16 What is your opinion of music examinations?

- ☐ A. They enable students to learn several skills.
- ☐ B. They build confidence in performing for an examiner.
- ☐ C. Students can learn from the mark/comment sheet.
- ☐ D. Not enough time to learn other pieces – only the examination pieces.
- ☐ E. Other

Q. 17 How can a teacher help the student to think and learn independently? Tick appropriate answers.

- ☐ A. Allow self-discovery by asking questions.
- ☐ B. Ask questions that make the student think.
- ☐ C. Use appropriate language for the student to understand.
- ☐ D. Help develop good learning and practice habits.
- ☐ E. Train the student to apply what is taught to other situations.
- ☐ F. Other

Q. 18 What do you look for when choosing a suitable method book? Give one (1) answer only.

- ☐ A. Instructions are well explained and easy to understand and follow.
- ☐ B. Books have attractive and colourful pictures with simple theory work.
- ☐ C. Teaching material flows logically.
- ☐ D. Other

Q. 19 What are the skills you would like your beginner and elementary students to be efficient in, as a basis for satisfaction and enjoyment in music making? Tick appropriately.

- ☐ A. Sight-reading
- ☐ B. Aural perception.
- ☐ C. Perform musically.
- ☐ D. Good understanding of the theory of music.
- ☐ E. Technique
- ☐ F. Other

Q. 20 Indicate the most effective way/s of teaching?

- ☐ A. Self-discovery by students.
- ☐ B. Tackle one task at a time.
- ☐ C. Give praise whenever improvement is shown.
- ☐ D. Teach creative practice methods to students.
- ☐ E. Other

Q. 21 What you think makes a good lesson? Tick the suitable answer/s.

- ☐ A. Identify the student's least successful activity and correct it.
- ☐ B. Ask questions to find out if the student understands what is taught.
- ☐ C. Demonstrate and then ask the student to do it.
- ☐ D. Question student at the end of the lesson on what has been learnt.
- ☐ E. Explain a concept a few times to make sure the student understands it.
- ☐ F. Other

Q. 22 How can a teacher enrich his/her own music skills?

- ☐ A. Challenge oneself to learn a new instrument.
- ☐ B. Attend seminars and master classes.
- ☐ C. Read many books on teaching.
- ☐ E. Expand performance skills and repertoire by playing with others.
- ☐ F. Other

Q. 23 Indicate the important characteristic/s you think every teacher must have.

- ☐ A. Possess sufficient knowledge and a commitment to further improvement.
- ☐ B. Passion, dedication, and inspiration.
- ☐ C. Patience and an ability to encourage.
- ☐ D. Humorous and enthusiasm.
- ☐ E. Other

Q. 24 What are appropriate personal qualities for teachers?

- ☐ A. Friendly
- ☐ B. Positive
- ☐ C. Imaginative and creative.
- ☐ D. Enjoy teaching.
- ☐ E. Relaxed manner.
- ☐ F. Comfortable in teaching.
- ☐ G. Other

Q. 25 What are the essential qualities needed to be a successful teacher?

- ☐ A. Power to inspire all students.
- ☐ B. Patient and tolerant.
- ☐ C. Sincere respect for students and a sense of fairness.
- ☐ D. A love of teaching.
- ☐ E. Other

APPENDIX 4: Interview format

1. Teachers

- What inspired you to become a piano teacher?
- How did you start your career as a piano teacher?
- What are your aims and goals in teaching piano?

2. Novice teachers

- How can a novice teacher gain teaching experience before starting to instruct students?
- What advice would you give novice teachers to assist them in their teaching?

3. Teacher skills, knowledge and qualities

- In your opinion, what are the basic foundations that teachers must give in the early stages to beginner students?
- What are common problems you come across when teaching beginner students?
- Do you think it necessary to set a different program for each individual student? Why?
- Do you include improvisation and other musicianship skills in your teaching program for beginner students? Why?
- How do you explore ways of meeting your students' needs?
- Do you set goals for all of your students? Give examples.
- How do you inspire a child to continue learning music for a long time?
- What are your views on group teaching?

4. Teaching Program

- In your opinion, what are the basic foundations that teachers must give in the early stages to beginner students?
- What are common problems you come across when teaching beginner students?
- Do you think it necessary to set a different program for each individual student? Why?
- Do you include improvisation and other musicianship skills in your teaching program for beginner students? Why?
- How do you explore ways of meeting your students' needs?
- Do you set goals for all of your students? Give examples.
- How do you inspire a child to continue learning music for a long time?
- What are your views on group teaching?

5. Sight- reading

- How do you encourage students who are weak in sight-reading to practise it?
- How do you help students with sight-reading during the lesson?

6. Practice

- 'Practice makes perfect!' How do you encourage your students to practise?

- What is your advice to students who do not practise enough but still want to continue to learn music?

7. Theory of music

- What can teachers do to students, who are not interested in theory of music?

8. Music examinations

- What are your views on music examinations?

9. Parental guidance

- Do you think that parental guidance is a help or hindrance to students? Why?

10. Advice for teachers

- What advice would you give to all piano teachers – novice and experienced?
- From your personal adventure in teaching please relate anything that you think might benefit novice teachers.

References

- Abeles, H. F., Hoffer, C. R., & Klotman, R. H. (1984). *Foundations of music education*. New York: Schirmer Books.
- Agay, D. (Ed.). (2004). Sight-reading: The basics, Step by step. In *The art of teaching piano*. (2nd Ed.) New York: Yorktown Music Press (pp. 197-218).
- Agay, D. (Ed.). (2004). Foreword. In *The art of teaching piano*. (2nd Ed.) New York: Yorktown Music Press (pp. 5-7).
- Agay, D. (Ed.). (2004). Memorisation and performing from memory. In *The art of teaching piano*. (2nd Ed.) New York: Yorktown Music Press (pp. 219-226).
- Agay, D. (Ed.). (2004). Parental involvement. In *The art of teaching piano*. (2nd Ed.) New York: Yorktown Music Press (pp. 487-489).
- Ahrens, C. B. & Atkinson, G. D. (1966). *For all piano teachers*. London: Lowe and Brydone.
- Anderson, G. (2001). *Fundamentals of educational research*. (2nd Ed.) London: RoutledgeFalmer, Taylor & Francis.
- Bakar-Jordan, M. (2004). *Practical piano pedagogy*. Florida: Warner Bros. Publications
- Barry, N. H. & Hallam, S. (2002). Practice. In R. Parncutt & G. E. McPherson (Eds.) *The science & psychology of music performance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (pp. 151-165).
- Bastein, J. W. (1995). *How to teach piano successfully*. (3rd Ed.) California: General Words and Music Company.
- Bennett, B. V. (1969). *Piano lessons for everyone*. New York: Philosophical Library.
- Berger, K. (2010). *Teaching music on your own*. New York: Penguin Group.

- Best, J. W. & Kahn, J. V. (2003). *Research in education*. (9th Ed.) Boston: A Pearson Education Company.
- Bigler, C. L. & Lloyd-Watts, B. (1998). *Studying Suzuki piano: More than music*. Florida: Summy-Birchard.
- Bolton, H. (1953). *On teaching the piano*. London: Novello and Co. Ltd.
- Bolton, H. (1957). *How to practice*. London: Elkin & Co.
- Bonetti, R. (2002). *Practice is a dirty word*. Australia: Published by Words & Words.
- Booth, V. (1971). *We piano teachers*. (8th Ed.) London: Hutchinson of London.
- Bridges, D. (1992). Proceedings of the musical association 1874-1904: The historical significance of British viewpoints on music theory and education. In M. Comte (Ed.) *Doreen Bridges: Music Educator*. Parkville, Victoria: Australian Society for Music Education Incorporated (pp. 24-42).
- Bridges, D. (1992). A new approach to basic musicianship. In M. Comte (Ed.) *Doreen Bridges: Music Educator*. Parkville, Victoria: Australian Society for Music Education Incorporated (pp. 67-69).
- Bridges, D. (1992). The private studio music teacher in Australia. In M. Comte (Ed.) *Doreen Bridges: Music Educator*. Parkville, Victoria: Australian Society for Music Education Incorporated (pp. 90-96).
- Bruxner, M. (1972). *Mastering the piano*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Bullard, A. (2010). A fresh approach to sight-reading. *Libretto 2010 issue, no. 1*. London, United Kingdom: ABRSM (pp. 6-7).
- Camp, M. W. (1992). *Teaching piano*. Los Angeles: Alfred Publishing Co.

- Campbell, P. S. (1991). *Lessons from the world*. New York, U.S.A.: Schirmer book a division of Macmillan, Inc.
- Ching, J. (1958). Handbook for piano teachers. Collected articles on subjects related to piano teaching. Evanston, Illinois: Summy-Birchard Publishing (pp. 20-27).
- Chronister, R. (1987). Naming notes is not reading – the keyboard arts approach to reading and sight-reading. In J. Lyke & Y. Enoch (Eds.) *Creative piano teaching*. (2nd Ed.) Illinois, U.S.A.: Stipes Publishing (pp. 113-124).
- Clark, V. L. & Creswell, J. W. (2010). *Understanding research*. Merrill, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education.
- Coats, S. (2006). *Thinking as you play*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Collins, R. (1986). *Piano playing*. New York: University Press of America.
- Colwell, R. J. (1969). *The teaching of instrumental music*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Cooke, C. (1948). *Playing the piano for pleasure*. London: The Falcon Press Limited.
- Creech, A. (2010). The music studio. In S. Hallam & A. Creech (Eds.) *A. Music education in the 21st century in the United Kingdom*. Institute of Education, University of London. London: Bedford Way Papers (pp. 295-313).
- Curwen, Mrs. (1913). *The teacher's guide*. London: J. Curwen & Sons Ltd.
- Derville, L. (1970). *The use of psychology in teaching*. London: Longman Group Limited.
- Deutsch, L. (1959). *Piano: guided sight-reading*. (2nd Ed.) Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

- Dawson, C. (2007). *A practical guide to research methods*. (3rd Ed.) Oxford, United Kingdom: How To Books Ltd.
- Enoch, Y. (1974). *Group piano teaching*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Enoch, Y. (1987). How to practice. In J. Lyke & Y. Enoch (Eds.) *Creative music teaching*. Illinois, USA: Stipes Publishing (pp. 162-174).
- Enoch, Y. (1987). Transposition. In J. Lyke & Y. Enoch (Eds.) *Creative music teaching*. (2nd Ed.) Illinois, USA: Stipes Publishing (pp. 125-128).
- Fink, A. (2006). *How to conduct surveys*. (3rd Ed.) Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Fisher, C. (2010). *Teaching piano in groups*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Folders, A. (1964). *Keys to the keyboard*. (4th Ed.) London: Oxford University Press.
- Giesecking, W. & Leimer, K. (1922). *Piano technique*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Goodkind, R. (2004). Theory: The basis of musicianship. In D. Agay (Ed.) *The art of teaching piano*. (2nd Ed.). New York: Yorktown Music Press (pp. 157-173).
- Gordon, S. (1995). *Etudes for piano teachers*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hallam, S. (1997). Practising. In Hallam, S., Cross, I., Thaut, M. (2009). (Eds.) *The Oxford handbook of music psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press (265-273).
- Hallam, S. & Creech, A. (2010) (Eds.) Learning to play an instrument. In *Music education in the 21st century in the United Kingdom*. London: ImageData Group (pp. 85-104).
- Hambourg, M. (1922). *How to become a pianist*. London: C. Arthur Pearson Ltd.

- Harris, P., & Crozier, P. (2000). *The music teacher's companion*. London: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (Publishing) Limited.
- Heese-Biber, S. N. & Leavy, P. (2006). *The practice of qualitative research*. California: Sage Publications.
- Highet, G. (1972). *The art of teaching*. London: Methuen & Co Ltd.
- Hofmann, J. (1910). *Piano questions*. London: Hodden & Stoughton.
- Jacobson, J. M. (2006). *Professional piano teaching*. Los Angeles: Alfred Publishing Co.
- Johnson, B. & Christensen, L. (2004). *Educational research*. (2nd Ed.) Boston: Person Education.
- Jorgensen, H. & Hallam, S. (2009). Practising. In Hallam, S., Cross, I. Thaut, M. (Eds.) *The Oxford handbook of music psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (pp. 265-273).
- King, V. (1997). *Playing the Piano Naturally*. Greenleaf, WI, U.S.A.: Conners Publications.
- Klingenstein, B. G. (2009). *The independent piano teacher's studio handbook*. Milwaukee, USA: Hal Leonard Corporation.
- Lang, B. F. (1998). *A piano teacher's words of wisdom*. North Carolina, U.S.A.: Pentland Press.
- Langley, E. (1963) *Principles of teaching as applied to music*. London: Lowe & Brydone Ltd.
- Last, J. (1966). *The young pianist*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Locke, L. F., Silverman, & S. J., Spirduso, W. W. (2010). *Reading and understanding research*. (3rd Ed.). California: Sage Publications.

- Lodico, M.G., Spaulding, D.T., & Voegtle, K. H. (2006). *Methods in educational research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lovelock, W. (1936). *Practical hints on the teaching of music for examination candidates and others*. London: Hammond & Co.
- Lovelock, W. (1937). *Handbook on the art of teaching as applied to music*. London: G. M. Battley.
- Lovelock, W. (1965). *Common sense in music teaching*. London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd.
- Lyke, J. (1987). Issues and trends in piano teaching. In J. Lyke & Y. Enoch (Eds.) *Creative piano teaching*. (2nd Ed.) Champaign, Illinois: Stipes Publishing Company (pp. 2-4).
- Lyke, J. (1987). What does it take to be a piano teacher? In J. Lyke & Y. Enoch (Eds.) *Creative piano teaching*. (2nd Ed.) Champaign, Illinois: Stipes Publishing Company (pp. 5-11).
- Lyke, J. (1987). Modes of instruction: Private/group or both? . In J. Lyke, & Y. Enoch. *Creative piano teaching* (Eds.). (2nd Ed.) Champaign, Illinois: Stipes Publishing Company (pp. 12-18).
- Lyons, E., & Coyle. A., Ed. (2007). *Analyzing qualitative data in psychology*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Mark, M.L., & Madura, P. (2010). *Music education in your hands*. New York: Routledge.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis*. (2nd Ed.) London: SAGE Publications.
- Minichiello V., Aroni R., Timewell E., & Alexander L. (1996). *In-depth Interviewing*. (2nd Ed.) Melbourne, Australia: Addison Wesley Longman Australia Pty Limited.
- Moss, E. (1989). *More than teaching*. Toronto: Gordon V. Thompson Music.

- Mursell, J. L. (1954). *Successful teaching, its psychological principles*. (2nd Ed.) New York: McGraw-Hill
- Newman, W. S. (1984). *The pianist's problems*. (4th Ed.) New York: Da Capo Press.
- Neuman, W. L. (2006). *Social Research Methods*. (6th Ed.) Boston: Pearson Education.
- Pearce, C. W. (1924). *The art of the piano teacher*. London: Lowe & Brydone Ltd.
- Phelps, R. P., Ferrara, L., & Goolsby, T. W. (1993). *A guide to research in music education*. (4th Ed.) Metuchen, N. J.: The Scarecrow Press.
- Punch K. F. (2006). *Developing effective research proposals*. (2nd Ed.) London: Sage Publications.
- Rabinof, S. (2004). Improvisation. In D. Agay (Ed.) *The art of teaching piano*. New York: Yorktown Music Press, Inc (pp. 227-243).
- Reeves, B. (1955). *Approach to piano teaching*. London: Bosworth & Co. Ltd.
- Regelski, T. A. & Gates, J. T. (2009). *Music education for changing times: guiding visions for practice*. New York: Springer.
- Richards, W. (1987). Music reading at the piano. In J. Lyke & Y. Enoch (Eds.) *Creative piano teaching*. (2nd Ed.) Illinois, USA: Stipes Publishing (pp. 102-112).
- Scaife, N. (2011). The art of audiation. In ABRSM *Libretto 2011, issue 1*, (pp. 14-15).
- Schaum, W., & Cupp, J. (1987). *Keyboard teaching with greater success and satisfaction*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, U.S.A.: Schaum Publications.
- Skaggs, H. G. (2004). The very young beginner. In D. Agay (Ed.). *The art of teaching piano*. (2nd Ed.). New York: Yorktown Music Press (pp. 247-252).

- Skaggs, H. G. (2004). Theory: The elementary aspects. In D. Agay (Ed.) *The art of teaching piano*. (2nd Ed.) New York: Yorktown Music Press, Inc (pp. 147-155).
- Skaggs, H. G. (2004). Group piano teaching. In D. Agay (Ed.) *The art of teaching piano*. (2nd Ed.) New York: Yorktown Music Press, Inc (pp. 265-276).
- Slenczynska, R. (1976). *Music at your finger tips*. New York: Published by Cornerstone Library.
- Stevens, K. M. (1988). *Interaction: The Hidden Key to Success in Group Piano Teaching*. Session of the Research Commission, XVIII Conference of the International Society for Music Education, Canberra, July 17-23, 1988.
- Tankard, G. (1966). *Piano Diplomas*. London: Elkin & Co. Ltd.
- Tayler, E. D. (1913). *The secret of successful practice*. London: Bosworth & Co.
- Taylor, K. (1981). *Principles of piano technique and interpretation*. Kent: Novello.
- Taylor, C. (2006). *These music exams*. (5th Ed.) London, England: Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music.
- Terwilliger, G. B. (1965). *Piano teacher's professional handbook*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Varro, M. (1997). *Dynamic piano teaching*. London: N. Simrock.
- Waterman, F. (1983). *On piano teaching and performing*. London: Faber Music Ltd.
- Watson, A. (2009). Studio music teachers and teaching: roles and responsibilities. In M. Comte (Ed.) *Musical Dimensions*. North Melbourne, Australia: Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty. Ltd (pp. 28-36).

Wilkinson, D. & Birmingham, P. (2003). *Using research instruments*. London:
RoutledgeFalmer Taylor & Francis Group.

Zimmerman, M. P. (1987). The application of psychological principles to the teaching of piano. In J. Lyke & Y. Enoch (Eds.) *Creative piano teaching*. (2nd Ed.) Champaign: Stipes Publishing Company (pp. 66-80).

